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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE NEW SENSIBILITY
AND
RECENT CANADIAN WRITING

by

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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled The New Sensibility and Recent Canadian Writing submitted by Roderick W. Harvey in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

In the first chapter of my thesis, I discuss how the process of cultural change creates the new sensibility, and I introduce various aspects of the new sensibility of the sixties. As society moved into the sixties, new electronic technologies created a new environment for contemporary artists. Rejecting the mechanism of early twentieth century technology, the new writers defined themselves in relation to Marshall McLuhan's global village. The shift from mechanical to electronic technology created a new multi-consciousness, a stress on in-depth human experience; moral difficulties arose as men and women tried to adapt to their new freedom. Using the new media as languages, writers began to explore man's place in a technological age.

Chapter II shows how the works of Mordecai Richler define the new sensibility. In his early novels, Richler is very much the typical early twentieth century writer in his essentially realistic discussions of the alienated artist-hero in society. In his later works, he is a conventional satirist as he attacks elements of the new sensibility. Yet in his last novel, St. Urbain's Horseman, he becomes a true comic artist of the new sensibility, accepting the new morality and working within it.

In Chapter III, I explore Margaret Atwood's tentative acceptance of the new electronic technology. Her poetry

describes a threatening, surrealistic technological universe, a trap for the man who abuses his new freedom. The progression from The Edible Woman to Surfacing reveals Atwood's own progress from hesitant exploration of the new sensibility to a final acceptance of man's new technological environment.

In Chapter IV, I examine Robert Kroetsch's technique of exploring various technologies by using the media as languages. In the early novels, Kroetsch develops a multi-levelled, symbolic novel form in which technology itself reflects reality. The universe appears as a landscape littered with discarded mechanical technologies. The Studhorse Man explores the limitations of the printed, sequential biography. Kroetsch's last novel, Gone Indian, escapes from these restrictions by using the electronic medium of the tape recorder.

Chapter V considers Michael Ondaatje's use of a new surrealism as a reflection of the new sensibility. When one environment is retrieved and set within a new environment, a new art form is created. Mechanical technologies from the past are archetypalized and discarded. In The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Ondaatje creates a multi-media happening as an exploration of the new sensibility. His lyric poems in The Dainty Monsters, The Man With Seven Toes, and Rat Jelly further define this world.

In Chapter VI, I describe bp Nichol's interest in a repositioning of language in the new electronic environment.

In Journeying and the Returns, he experiments with the way electronic media can create a new language. Monotones and The Martyrology explore the way various technologies act as languages; these works also indicate Nichol's interest in a new language, one stressing the oral rather than the printed word. In all Nichol's works, language is distorted, expanded, and in the process made new.

In the concluding chapter of my thesis, I return to general elements of the new sensibility, and I relate these to the new writers of the sixties and seventies. This chapter provides a coda to the ideas explored in the thesis, and stresses that the changes caused by the new sensibility are still with us today.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE NEW SENSIBILITY

This thesis explores the fact that the new technological environment of the sixties created a new style, a new sensibility which influenced Canadian writers of the sixties and the early seventies. Writers of this period whose earliest work dates from the fifties show a shift in aesthetic style as they relate to the new sensibility. Marshall McLuhan's _The Mechanical Bride_, published in 1951, explores a world of static mechanical technologies we hardly know today. Yet McLuhan's recent works such as _Understanding Media_, _The Gutenberg Galaxy_, and _Culture is Our Business_ show his awareness of a new multi-media approach directly appropriate to the new technology. Mordecai Richler's early novel _The Acrobats_, published in 1954, is a static, conventional novel of alienation; his latest novel, _St. Urbain's Horseman_, describes man attempting to understand the new, involved morality of the technological environment. Margaret Atwood's first novel, _The Edible Woman_, describes a woman attempting to impose a dated, mechanical approach on her technological surroundings. However, the stress on ecological concerns and personal involvement in Atwood's most recent novel, _Surfacing_, makes the latter work a central document of the new sensibility. As writers begin to explore the new sensibility, their works alter to reflect the new technological environment.

The most direct approach to the new sensibility is through the new, revolutionary electronic technology that completely changed the environment of the sixties. As Marshall McLuhan shows in Understanding Media and The Gutenberg Galaxy, the mechanical technology of the old sensibility was superseded by a new multiplication of electronic technologies. Electronic media such as television, videotape, micro-print, and tape recording began to provide instant information retrieval. Extending himself through these new technologies, contemporary man found a new multiple awareness, or multi-consciousness, based on the tribalizing power of the new electronic media. In From There to Here, Frank Davey describes these new electronic technologies:

> Dominating all literary, cultural, and political developments of the past two decades in Canada has been the world-wide burgeoning of micro-electronic technology. We have become engulfed in a "media" age in which the media themselves--radio, film, television, audio tape, video tape, microwave, xerox, microfiche, computer tape, etc.--have steadily increased in both power and number. Under the influence of technology, the information available to us has expanded even faster than the growing number of means we have to retrieve it. Together, the expansion of both information and media systems have effected radical changes on the relations between nation-states and individuals, and on the perceptual outlooks of artists and non-artists alike.[1]

The global village made possible in the sixties by the new media exemplified the new sensibility. Involved and aware, its citizens began to rely on instant electronic information through television rather than the printed word. Writers who relate to the new sensibility are aware of the power and complications involved in the new technological environment. In her novel Lives of Girls and Women, Alice Munro uses an old car to represent the discarded mechanical technology of a pre-electric age. Wilfred Watson's poem "I Shot a Trumpet into my Brain" explores the demobilization of human awareness through a catalogue of the new technologies. The poems of Lionel Kearns and bp Nichol describe and embody various technologies. In his poem "Telephone," for instance, Kearns explores the limitations of the telephone as a medium:

> . . . the one person
> he could actually talk to
> was the directory girl
> who answered when he dialed Information
> the only number
> that could be reached
> without first inserting a coin
> and he would talk to her [2]
> whenever he could.

Other writers of the sixties examine the influences of the new technology on man. Robert Kroetsch's Gone Indian is a collection of tape recordings rather than a novel; Mordecai Richler's novels The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, Cocksure, and Saint Urbain's Horseman are works exploring the impact of film as a medium on the lives of average citizens. The satirical novelist Leo Simpson uses media as a target for satire; Arkwright is a satire on television, and The Peacock Papers is a biting attack on the proponents of the new media. The media pundit of The Peacock Papers, a Dr. Harrison Royce, is a caricature of Marshall McLuhan. In all these novels interviews, fragments of films, letters, and newspaper items are used as the book tends to become a multi-media form. As Frank Davey points out in From There to Here, Marshall McLuhan's stress on multi-media and multi-consciousness is central to the new sensibility:

> His central idea, expanded from Harold Adams Innis's perception of the central importance of communications in shaping the character of a culture, has been that the way in which information is communicated can be of greater significance than the content of information. Changes in the dominant modes of communication, and of the human senses that these modes involve, can alter human consciousness and cause massive shifts in the course of history and culture. McLuhan identifies three major communication periods: the aural, from man's beginning to 1460; the Gutenberg, from 1460-1960; and the electric, from 1960-present. The aural period is one of multi-sensory communication and decentralized and communal living patterns. The Gutenberg is a print and eye-oriented time in which the logical, sequential, and single-track flow of the printed sentence becomes a model for mass production of uniform products, centralized organization, and compartmentalized intellectual disciplines. The electric sees the arrival of totally immersing multiphasic media--television, in particular--which once again demand multi-sensory response and encourage decentralized living patterns.[3]

The new sensibility affects those writers who before the sixties were relatively conventional. A writer who wishes to relate to the new sensibility must learn to adapt to the new media. Margaret Laurence's best known novel, The Stone Angel, is not an experimental work, but in her latest novel, The Diviners, Laurence introduces the media form of the "memorybank movie" as a filmic device allowing flashbacks to the narrator's childhood. Writers of the old sensibility are forced to adapt to the new. Their adaptation makes them part of the new sensibility, and their works then define it. Indeed, any writer who refuses to adapt to the new sensibility tends to sound irrelevant in the context of new media and technologies.

In the sixties, the medium was the message. The intimacy of the recording media created the stars Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, and Leonard Cohen. Mixed media shows combined poetry, film, music, dance, video tape, and painting. Music, painting, and sculpture began to emphasize a new rationality, a new impersonality characteristic of the new sensibility. A sensitivity to the new media produced the precision of atonal music and "mini-art." In works of the old sensibility, verbal language had mobilized the whole or nearly the whole of consciousness. Competing media in various art forms had caused such explosions as Finnegans Wake or some modes of modern expressionist painting. Yet the new sensibility of the sixties allowed verbal constructs to exist along with other technologies; consciousness was demobilized through the interplay of new electronic technologies. Poets such as Bill Bissett and bp Nichol recorded chants and sound poetry; other poets such as Michael Ondaatje became film makers--we recall Ondaatje's film of bp Nichol, "Sons of Captain Poetry." Instead of conventional books of poetry, experimental avant-garde poets began producing poetry "happenings"; one example is bp Nichol's Still Water, a box of poems to be assembled at random. Poetry began to reflect the randomness, the spontaneity of the new electronic media. Bill Bissett's "Circles in th Sun" is a hypnotic, haunting song:

> In th mushroom village
> all th littul children
> brightly smiling
>
> in th mushroom village
> all th littul children
> brightly be
>
> asking only for th river
> asking only for th river[4]

The new sensibility implies a "repositioning of language," for the new media or technologies act as languages. Writers of the old sensibility had attempted to say everything with language; this had led to the complexity and difficulty of Finnegans Wake and similar works. Yet the new sensibility concedes to media a place in the articulating of human consciousness, and hence the new writers are more coherent, less ego-centred. Using language in a precise, impersonal way, they are anti-expressionist rather than expressionist. This aspect of the new sensibility appears in the works of such avant-garde poets as Bill Bissett, bp Nichol, Victor Coleman, George Bowering, and Michael Ondaatje. Their interests in exploring the new media reflect the decentralized, non-authoritarian environment of the sixties. Media began to represent the demobilization of human consciousness. For George Bowering in the poem "Stab," the photograph as image is more important than the content of it as a medium:

> I am a fourth.
> My brain presents a picture
> to the back of my eyes

to hold there as I look
into my woman's face[5]

During the sixties the drug culture provided a new source of experience for some of these poets. As the power of the new media was extended through LSD, marijuana, mescaline, amphetamines, and other drugs, artists tried to give aesthetic shape to experiences of a hallucinogenic nature. Poets such as Leonard Cohen, Victor Coleman, and Joe Rosenblatt used drug induced experiences to symbolize the freedom of a new sensibility. The resulting dream visions are startling indeed. In Joe Rosenblatt's poem "The Electric Rose," for instance, the poet examines a rose and finds that "its body was a crucible of fire/ and its stamens/ . . . electrodes!"[6]

The writing of the new sensibility is remarkably varied in style. As Frank Davey points out, its only authorities are those philosophers who announce the end of authority--Marshall McLuhan, Charles Olson, Jack Spicer, and Alfred North Whitehead.[7] A poet such as Michael Ondaatje may make a film, or may prefer to record a series of chants, as both Bill Bissett and bp Nichol have done. Borrowing techniques from various media, a writer may create a "new surrealism," a mosaic of new media, as Michael Ondaatje does in The Collected Works of Billy The Kid. Certain writers may stress the visual aspects of the printed word; bp Nichol, Victor Coleman, and John Robert Colombo have written "object poems" as well as more conventional concrete poetry. Such an "object poem" is Colombo's "Marking Time":

i I am a pupil
with two
billion teachers.

ii There are things
that only
exist on paper.

iii There are questions
so old I can't [8]
remember the answers.

In the world of the new electric technology, the eye and ear are resensitized. Writers of the new sensibility have experimented with a new language based on the oral rather than the printed word. The new language can be pornographic and can include any number of obscenities; there is no centre and no structure in the technological universe of the sixties. Working with other members of the West Coast TISH group of poets, such writers as Frank Davey, Bill Bissett and Lionel Kearns produced poems that were centred on the new technological environment. The poems collected in Kearns' By the Light of the Silvery McLune can also be called "media parables." The controlling metaphor of Frank Davey's Arcana is the Tarot pack of cards, and various poems such as "Manuscript, 19 April, 1965" show the poet trying to wrestle with the manuscript as medium in the technological age:

"Tonight I would write, & once again
try to begin by counting.
By counting the leaves
on the orange tree behind the sofa,
the old magazines in their rack,
my cards, my birthday cards tonight
ranged by her neatly
on the stereo,
& the week's newspapers

not so neatly
scattered on the floor."[9]

The attempt to develop a new, oral language in the sixties was not limited to avante-garde poets. Novelists such as Matt Cohen, Rudy Wiebe, Robert Kroetsch, and Dave Godfrey used the new electric technology to symbolize the growth of the new sensibility. The multiple centres of Kroetsch's plots, shifting points of view in Cohen's The Disinherited, and the eloquence of Big Bear in Wiebe's The Temptations of Big Bear are equally persuasive in proclaiming the end of modernism and the emergence of a new "decentralized, 'post-electric,' post-modern, non-authoritarian age."[10] As Frank Davey explains in From There to Here, electric technology leads us beyond modernism and its artificial structures towards a new cooperative freedom:

> In the post-modern world of counterpointing influences, centres, and traditions, the claim that a single tradition can be central or orthodox has become meaningless. When micro-electric technology offers new hope of resisting the centralizing forces of mechanical technology, utter rejection of the twentieth century becomes a less attractive option. When the very diversity and looseness of contemporary structures invite commitment and participation, the values of detachment and impersonality fade. The classical artistic concept of the totally integrated whole has no incarnation in a sensory reality that is everywhere fragmented, discontinuous, post logical. Contemporary man becomes suspicious of both the fabricated multiplex over-structures of Joyce and Eliot and of the centralized ones of institutional authority; the message of his electronically amplified senses is that his culture and the universe are randomly interacting cooperatives continually evolving new relationships and forms.[11]

The modernist movement of the twenties might be called a prelude to the involved, sensory models of the new electric environment in the sixties. The modernist experiments of James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and the cubist painters, however, were based on controlled, sculptured rhetoric and rigid, anti-democratic forms. Scorning popular culture and commercial art forms, modernists preferred formally structured references to myth and history.[12] In the work of the New Critics--T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, William Empson, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, and others--the work of art was viewed as a static, aesthetic object; the stress was on its form and structure.[13] Although modernist writers such as James Joyce and Gertrude Stein experimented with more organic modes of perception, most writers of the modernist movement stressed controlled form and aesthetic discipline.

The electronic environment of the new sensibility stresses simultaneity rather than mechanical rigidity, and it moves man beyond the restrictions of modernism. However, it is often difficult to distinguish between the new sensibility and the early modern sensibility. When the new writers retrieve works of the modernist period, they seem to resemble modernist writers; and we might well ask if the new sensibility is simply a repetition of the early modern sensibility. In his later works such as From Cliché to Archetype and Counterblast, Marshall McLuhan often quotes from James Joyce's Finnegans Wake; many of bp Nichol's critical ideas in "SOME CASE HISTORIES: a case history" appear to be based on those of Gertrude Stein. Michael Ondaatje in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid adopts a surrealistic approach reminding us of the modernist surrealist movement. The new writers are eclectic in their retrieval of information; they set old environments within new ones, and thus create new art forms. In the electronic environment of the new sensibility, information may be instantly retrieved--and often replayed.

Indeed, the new sensibility makes the entire earth a work of art. Andy Warhol's tomato soup cans and Brillo Pad boxes become art within an art gallery. New writers such as Victor Coleman, bp Nichol, Matt Cohen, and Dave Godfrey stress the values of process, of discontinuity and organic shape as they explore the interaction of various technological environments. The extension of man's nervous system through electric technology leads to a new post-modernist sensibility, to a new freedom beyond the control of mechanism. The perceptions of writers become deliberately kinetic, disorganized; we recall the poetry of Bill Bissett, Michael Ondaatje's miscellaneous collection of documents in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, and Dave Godfrey's multiply centred novel of Africa, The New Ancestors. A blend of physics, biology, politics, and psychology, The New Ancestors uses the metaphor of the camera to represent the need for unity in the new sensibility:

> Yes. You had been ou[illegible] the world then. You were creating your camera and could not yet become both cameraman and subject. You were still attempting to

> be something more than a wide screen for the projections of others. Perhaps those were the real encounters. When they arrived purely and the fear descended without your knowing what the next instant would bring.[14]

The non-authoritarian universe of a Dave Godfrey, a Margaret Atwood, or a bp Nichol defines the changes in society dictated by the electric technology of the sixties. Films, novels, and poetry became political acts, as we see in Godfrey's The New Ancestors and Atwood's Surfacing. In the election of politicians such as John F. Kennedy in 1962 and Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1968, politics became synonymous with the image-making power of the new electric technology. Artists such as Marlon Brando, Jane Fonda, and Paul Newman used their film careers as a springboard to active roles in dissident politics. The decentralized, non-authoritarian world of the new sensibility created new groups and sub-cultures such as Hell's Angels, the Beatles, Hare Krishnas, and the Black Panthers. Electric technology made everyone familiar with the problems of Indian and Negro minorities and with the activities of civil rights groups such as Students for a Democratic Society, Black Power, and Women's Liberation.[15]

The most significant of these groups, the "youth culture" or "counter-culture," has been examined in such influential books as Charles Reich's The Greening of America, Theodore Roszak's The Making of a Counter-culture, and Robert Hunter's The Enemies of Anarchy. Instead of the competitive materialism of mechanical technology, members of the counter-culture stressed their own hand-made pottery, organic foods, and living close to the land without the support of mechanical systems. Their life style stressed honesty rather than artificiality, meaning rather than acquisition. The works of Margaret Atwood, Robert Kroetsch, and Victor Coleman are alike in embodying this rejection of consumerism and the development of a new, unitary sensibility. The narrator of Atwood's Surfacing, for example, must opt out of society to escape the technological mentality of her urban friends. In Kroetsch's Gone Indian, the narrator Jeremy Sadness prefers to define himself through the tape recorder rather than by the standards set for him by the monolithic, mechanized academic world.

The new counter-culture of the sixties stressed the necessity for involvement and for "taking a stand." Though opting out of society was a possibility for some, many preferred to stay within society and to protest indignities against the new sensibility. Campus protests suddenly erupted at San Francisco State, UBC, SFU, Columbia, and Berkeley. Canada herself became a significant counter-structure to the mechanized forces of American technology that owned much of the Canadian economy--Exxon, Texas Gulf, IBM, General Foods, and General Motors.[16] Some writers such as Margaret Atwood, Dennis Lee, and Mordecai Richler discussed the advantages and disadvantages of Canadian nationalism as an antidote to American technology; in Richler's prose writings in Hunting Tigers Under Glass and

Shovelling Trouble, he clearly shows his own preference for the internationalist approach. The tribal village of the new electronic sensibility decentralizes to form a field, and the field implies the avoidance of national differences and boundaries. The nationalism of Dennis Lee and Margaret Atwood seems rather facile in this context.

The extended sensibility of the new electric technology implies that man is only one element in the total environmental field. During the sixties, man became considerably more aware of himself as a social and political animal. The populism of the counter-culture reminds us of the discussion of Marxism in the thirties; the Communism discussed in Western society at that time seems merely a "play" on the new sensibility, a prelude to the more involving, in-depth populism of the sixties. Though the new generation rejects all institutionalized politics, it has been quick to adopt the populist Marxism implied in works such as Herbert Marcuse's One Dimensional Man, Paul Goodman's Growing Up Absurd, and Robert Hunter's The Enemies of Anarchy. Man is a social organism, and he must interact with other elements of his social environment. During the sixties the new technology made us aware of the junk pile of mechanical technologies surrounding us, of the threats posed by the Viet Nam war, the Cold War, and the atom bomb. Each evening the major networks described the global problems caused by war, famine, and the population explosion. The new sensibility began to make man aware that survival lay not so much in competitive individualism as in mutual cooperation. Through the electric

3

extensions of the new technology, man became aware of the need for deep involvement in a major problem created by mechanical technology--environmental destruction. Books such as Margaret Atwood's Surfacing and Dave Godfrey's The New Ancestors explored the new electric technology's ability to free us from a mechanized junk pile.

Yet the ecological position was not the most revolutionary aspect of the new sensibility. More important was the new attitude to personal relationships in a world dominated by the electric extensions of the human sensibility. Sexual relationships began to be explicitly delineated on stage, screen, and in books. Films such as Last Tango in Paris and Deep Throat generated minor furors and then were shown almost everywhere; explicit sex manuals such as The Sensuous Man, The Sensuous Woman, and Dr. David Reuben's Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex appeared on neighbourhood newsstands. Attitudes to marriage were examined; couples often lived with each other before marriage, and premarital sexual relations were no longer condemned. Birth control pills became freely available. Women's Liberation stressed the need for women to have equal rights in a world previously dominated by men. Such influential books as Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch, Lisa Hobbs' Love and Liberation and new women's magazines such as Gloria Steinem's Ms. and the Edmonton-based Branching Out explored the problems of women in society. The roles of men and women were challenged and often exposed; the new sexuality and the new morality demanded the in-depth involvement of electric technology. Unisex clothes stressed the unified, organic possibilities of the new sensibility rather than the stylized differences of previous fashions.

Writers of the sixties explored the implications of the new social involvement. In Alice Munro's Lives of Girls and Women, for instance, the narrator Del tells us that "I saw that the whole of nature became debased, maddeningly erotic."[17] The environment becomes the new sensibility, the new morality; Munro's interest is in how Del as a woman reacts to it. My thesis explores how selected writers of the sixties and early seventies viewed the implications of the changes in the environment of the sixties. These writers react to the new sensibility in different ways; their work takes its shape from many of the ideas I have discussed. The novels of Mordecai Richler, the first writer in my study, effectively define the new sensibility. A satirist in the tradition of Swift, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell, Richler is concerned with the threats to civilization provided by shifts in media and technologies. As mechanical technology shifts into the electronic environment of the sixties, Richler describes a series of characters in his novels trying to understand the technological changes in society. His first novel, The Acrobats, belongs to the old sensibility; and even when Richler turns to the world of film in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and Cocksure he seems to be resisting the new sensibility. Indeed, much of Richler's work shows his skepticism of man's new freedom in a decentralized, non-authoritarian electronic environment. Only in his last novel, St. Urbain's Horseman, does Richler become a true comic artist of the new sensibility. His earlier works, however, are important documents in the definition of the new sensibility, for they define problems of sexuality and morality man begins to face only in the bewildering technological environment of the sixties.

Virtually all Richler's novels involve the efforts of artists, film-makers, and writers struggling to maintain aesthetic balance in a universe of rapid technological expansion. Like the characters in Richler's novels, Margaret Atwood fumbles with the new sensibility, tries to withstand it, but eventually succumbs and belongs to it. Her first novel, The Edible Woman, shows a woman coping with the developing new sensibility by adopting dated, hesitant defence mechanisms. Yet Atwood's latest novel, Surfacing, describes a narrator relating to the new sensibility almost as if she is a member of the counter-culture. Atwood's poetry extends this role to that of any member of a modern technological society.

Atwood's Surfacing and her poetry provide precise, explicit explorations of the non-authoritarian, sensory world created by the new electric technology. Both she and the next novelist in my study, Robert Kroetsch, oppose the new electric environment to a universe of discarded mechanical technologies, a sort of mechanized junk pile. The bleak, multi-levelled universe of Kroetsch's early novels explores the experiencing perception in a hostile, mechanical world. In his novel The Studhorse Man, Kroetsch explicitly considers the limiting influences of the printed book, the conventional biography, in an organic, sensory perceptive world. Discontinuity and chaos are characteristics of Kroetsch's vision. His last novel, Gone Indian, juxtaposes the fluid reality of electronic tape recordings against the impersonal, mechanized bureaucracy of the university. In the deep involvement of the global village, authority and rigidity are irrelevant.

I have said earlier that the new sensibility is evident in the works of avant-garde poets. The thesis concludes with chapters devoted to two of Canada's most experimental avant-garde poets: Michael Ondaatje and bp Nichol. Using a poetic language that is precise, ironic, and surrealistic, Ondaatje explores the implications of his technological world. In his most impressive work, The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, he moves beyond the limitations of the printed book to a multi-media montage of photographs, poetic fragments, newspaper items, interviews, and impressionistic prose passages. Breaking through the limitations of various media, Ondaatje is perfectly characteristic of the new organic, unified sensibility in the electronic age. Yet the most experimental, creative work in this area today is probably that of bp Nichol, a young Canadian poet who first attained prominence in the sixties. Nichol's experiments in sound and visual poetry unify the new media; his work ultimately indicates the breakdown of conventional poetic forms and the emergence of a new oral language based on the tribal voices of the new electric technologies. His widely praised work The Martyrology suggests that language itself has become a trap for the poet; a new, revolutionary language is needed, one based on the rhythms and inflections of the spoken word.

CHAPTER II

MORDECAI RICHLER: DEFINING THE NEW SENSIBILITY

One Canadian writer with a large international audience is the novelist Mordecai Richler. Born and educated in Montreal, Richler lived for twenty years in London, England, though recently he returned to Canada to work on the film version of The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. When the film was completed, he remained in Montreal as the Canadian agent for the Book-of-the-Month-Club. In an early interview with Nathan Cohen, Richler stressed his pecuniary interest in writing for the movies; as he put it, it is "much more painless to write a hack TV script and earn enough money to live six months than to work in a factory or take a summer job."[1] Richler's experiments with film as a medium, however, are central to his development as a novelist. Both his uncle and grandfather were Yiddish writers, but he himself prefers to write novels and articles in a cosmopolitan North American voice.[2] After leaving university Richler went to Paris, where he met American writers Allen Ginsberg, Herbert Gold, and Terry Southern, and his work has always been aimed at the international rather than the Canadian literary market.[3] His most obvious affinities lie with modern American Jewish novelists--Philip Roth, Norman Mailer, and Leslie Fiedler.

Richler has always been critical of the Canadian literary scene, and he tends to be defensive when asked whether he considers himself a Canadian writer. "I am not a European writer and I couldn't become one if I stayed here twenty-five years," he told Nathan Cohen. "All my attitudes are Canadian; I'm a Canadian; there's nothing to be done about it."[4] Nevertheless, he often ridicules those who consider themselves Canadians, since his view is that Canadian values are excessively parochial. In his article "Quebec Oui, Ottawa Non," he quotes from a jingoistic editorial widely reprinted by Thompson Newspapers:

> I love Canada . . . a thousand critics inform me that there is no such thing as a Canadian, no separate and distinct Canadian identity. I am one . . . I love Canada. Our politics are dull and our sports bush league, but you can't beat the beer or the air . . . I am a Canadian. Are there any more like me?[5]

Most of Richler's novels have characters who are trying to break free of Canadian values, and like Richler himself most choose voluntary exile in another country. He agrees with the 1964 "Canadian Manifesto" of several French-Canadian intellectuals--among them Pierre Trudeau--which states that extreme nationalism "distorts one's vision of reality, prevents one from seeing problems in true perspective, falsifies solutions, and constitutes a classic diversionary tactic for politicians caught by facts."[6] It is hard to disagree with such a statement, but at times we feel that Richler is critical of more than the nationalistic aspects of the Canadian scene, and indeed sometimes he seems to have really lost touch with Canadian customs and events. As

Donald Cameron puts it:

> He knows about books and writing--the Penguin anthology, for instance, is assembled with taste and discernment. He knows the international set. He knows London about as well as a non-native can. But when it comes to Canada, he knows about a small part of the past, geographically located in Montreal and, to a lesser extent, Toronto. I grew up in Vancouver and live in the Maritimes, and I've never really recognized my Canada in Richler's, except in bits and starts.[7]

Richler's own hostility to provincialism was probably accentuated by his provincial upbringing in the Jewish quarter of Montreal.[8] He is now well established as a writer of international stature, and seems to resent recent Canadian attempts to define patterns of Canadian history, politics, and literature. "The way ahead in the academic waters of Canadian literature is clearly charted," says Richler in "Wally Sylvester's Canadiana." "You find yourself a dead and obscure writer and stake a claim to his revival."[9] In his novel The Incomparable Atuk, Richler satirizes the development of the young, obscure writer in Canada, and implies that Canadians have no sense of values when judging Canadian writing. Looking chiefly to the United States for literary standards, he believes that "the largest unmanned frontier in the world is an artificial one," and looks forward "to the day when it will disappear and Canadians will join fully in the American adventure."[10] His view is that the young writer in Canada risks being "overwhelmed" by the CBC and the universities, and that through being invited to speak, commissioned to write articles, and presented with artists' grants the writer will lose his sense of proportion.[11] This view may hold true in a few cases, but the last few years have seen many young writers--Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, and Robert Kroetsch, for example--helped by the CBC, the Canada Council, and the universities, and without this encouragement such writers would have found their task much more difficult.

Richler has always emphasized his affinities with American rather than English novelists. As he told Nathan Cohen in 1957, "I feel more affinity with young writers in New York, with Mailer and Algren and William Styron and Herbert Gold. . . . The young writers here in England, like Kingsley Amis--who is very good--still seem to be writing almost provincial undergraduate jokes in a very special context."[12] Of English novelists only Evelyn Waugh appears to interest him, perhaps because Waugh is a satirist; but in the United States he considers William Faulkner, Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, and Bernard Malamud to be important writers.[13] As he pointed out to Nathan Cohen, he has always been attracted to the size and scope of American writing:

> . . . I consider myself an American, and the first novels I read were American. I read Dos Passos and Hemingway and Fitzgerald and Faulkner, and these are people who influenced me a great deal. And of course my attitudes are American. . . . And when I say that American novelists are more ambitious, what I mean is they work on a much broader canvas and with much more freedom because the society is more flexible.[14]

The progress of Richler as a writer effectively defines the new sensibility. The protagonists of his novels are from the new world of media and technology, and they are confused by the technological environment affecting their lives. In early works such as The Acrobats, Son of a Smaller Hero, and A Choice of Enemies, Richler's approach is the conventional one of most novelists of the fifties. The figure of the artist, writer, or film-maker becomes one of alienation; the artist cannot understand technological change and tends to withdraw from society. The plots of Richler's early novels are realistic, stereotyped, and we find that his characters are obsessed with the disadvantages of the new technological environment. The artist is still the alienated man of the early twentieth century. But as Richler moves towards the sixties and the new sensibility his approach changes. The satirical Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz shows a technological anti-hero surrounded by artifacts of the mechanical age--cars, trucks, planes, pinball machines. The shifts of film and the inclusion of other media such as interviews, newspaper items, talk shows, and letters become an important part of Richler's technique. In his prose writing, he begins to attack the confines of nationalism, preferring instead the wider ranges of the electronic global village. His writers, film makers, and artists are defined by the influences of the non-authoritarian new sensibility, the permissive society. Yet Richler as a satirist often seems to resist the new sensibility; in Cocksure, for instance, his characters cannot seem to accept the new freedom conferred by a new electronic environment. For the men and women in most of Richler's novels, the new technology provides a threat to the stability of urban civilization. In Saint Urbain's Horseman, however, Richler clearly shows that he has accepted the new sensibility, for his characters accept the new morality of the sixties and try to relate to it; they avoid the withdrawal into alienation characteristic of fiction written before the sixties.

RICHLER'S EARLY NOVELS DEFINE THE ALIENATION CHARACTERISTIC OF THE OLD SENSIBILITY

When Richler began writing in the early fifties, he chose as his subject a typical cliché from the old sensibility: the alienated hero attempting to withdraw from a mechanized universe. He set his first novel, The Acrobats (1954), in Spain, and like many other writers before him, he described a group of North American expatriates attempting to withdraw from the technologies of their society. In prose style and content, Richler was heavily influenced by such modernist writers as Ernest Hemingway and John O'Hara, and indeed The Acrobats reminds us of the bitter disillusionment in Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises.[15] The main character, André Bennett, is a Canadian painter living in Spain, and his friends--Toni, the innocent prostitute; Chaim, the wise old wandering Jew; Barney, the rich American abroad; and Roger Kraus, the efficient German--tend to be mere mouthpieces for Richler's own disillusioned sentiments of the time.[16] All must live within a corrupt society, and indeed all are members of what has been called the "lost generation."[17] The Acrobats is a complicated novel of its type, but it does not depart from the conventional themes of novels about the "lost generation": difficulties of communication, the opposition between power and idealism, and the belief that all men hide their true feelings behind shifting masks of hypocrisy.[18]

When The Acrobats was published, a review in The Spectator noted that "Mr. Richler (of Canada) is trying hard in Valencia to be old and disillusioned and European. At twenty-two this is not very easy, even for so distinguished a talent as Mr. Richler."[19] This is the central difficulty in the novel. Richler was unable to publish his novel in Canada (he says he was asked if it was "thick" or "anti-Canadian"), and when it finally appeared only Nathan Cohen appeared to like it.[20] But as Richler himself points out in "Like Children to the Fair," "if I sneered at Canada in my first novel, and I did, it was more at the booster's concept of Canada than at the country itself . . . I didn't, and still don't, know very much about the place."[21] Writing as an expatriate, Richler uses his Canadian background in The Acrobats as a representation of what he dislikes about the Canadian artistic scene. Yet he told Nathan Cohen:

> I don't think of myself as an expatriate. I think words like 'generation,' 'expatriate,' and on another level 'honour' and 'love' have become almost advertising executive words, and those labels when attached to writers are very inhibiting and

> unfortunate. I don't think that writers think of themselves as expatriates or as speaking for their generation or any generation, if they are at all serious.[22]

The characters in The Acrobats are true expatriates, for they are ideologically opposed to North American values. The background of their experiences in Spain is a festival, and the totemic figures of the festival, the wooden "fallas," are themselves symbols of the masks man uses to conceal his own hypocrisy. As André's friend Derek puts it, "perhaps in all of us there is some evil and we're just too weak to burn it. So we build toys and dance around them, later we burn them."[23] The society these expatriates have left behind often appears misguided, meaningless; and as André tells himself, "America is a furnace and the temperature is 180F and still going up" (Acrobats, p. 86). In The Acrobats as in his later novels, Richler considers American and Canadian society as synonymous; the opposition is to the North American consumer culture, and he does not try to articulate differences between Canadian and American perception. André's description of his university experiences could refer to any North American university: "Everyone used to make wisecracks about me. Bennett of the New Aristocracy. Comrade Moneybags Bennett. The football-cocktail set ignored me because I refused a fraternity key" (Acrobats, p. 122). Since he views the values of North American society as pretentious masks, André must exile himself to Spain in order to exist as an artist.

"When I was a kid," Richler told Graeme Gibson, "I wanted to write like Malraux and Jean-Paul Sartre and Hemingway; in some ways I guess The Acrobats is a pastiche of that kind of writing."[25] The attitude of world-weary disgust we find in that novel is, of course, common in the works of these other writers. As in Hemingway's novel For Whom the Bell Tolls, we recognize the collapse of values in our time, and André's cryptic remarks are similar to those of Frederic Henry, Jake Barnes, or indeed any of those post-romantic characters who survive in a decadent world by refusing to care deeply about anything at all.[26] Life becomes a game and these characters must play according to a strict set of rules. As Chaim points out, "the world is full of tough guys" (Acrobats, p. 45), and we see an innocent Canadian meeting such men as the decadent Roger Kraus, a German who plays games of efficient brutality. As Graeme Gibson points out, Kraus is the man who has survived, and his values are destructive.[27] Obsessed with his hatred of the Jewish people, Kraus has assumed the mask of the efficient soldier: he treats his women as objects to be enjoyed, boasts of his war experiences, and finally kills André because he thinks André has insulted him. Against the hatred of this man, who appears as a grotesque figure reminding us of Dingleman in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, the passive André has no defense, for as he puts it, the words "courage, soul, beautiful, [and] honour" lose their meaning when opposed to the values of those like Kraus"(Acrobats, p. 48).

Richler told Nathan Cohen that "André is probably suffering a very sensitive reaction to all the corruption about him and hasn't as a character reached the positive stage of the search when he dies."[28] The men and women of the novel are by turns empty, trivial, and disgusting, and André's reaction is a surrender to the forces of alienation.[29] The novel's plot becomes an allegory for the failure of social revolution in the post-war world, for in his death André assumes the guilt which he believes is the pattern of the human condition.[30] In his exile he escapes from some aspects of North American life, but he finds that Europe has very little else to offer him. "I write out of a kind of disgust with things as they are," Richler told Graeme Gibson, and in The Acrobats there is little except disgust and disillusionment.[31]

Each character in the novel is a failure in some way, just as André is an unsuccessful painter; these are "the cardboard men, the separated lovers, the broken republicans, the discards" (Acrobats, p. 35). They gather in bars, in hotels, and in the streets; they discuss the past and the future. Surrounded by American tourists who do not understand them, these exiles create their own world of boredom, hypocrisy, and cynicism. We are told that for André, "life had become a job . . . a mumbo jumbo with rules to be followed" (Acrobats, p. 25), and as he points out, "everything is a joke. It has to be" (Acrobats, p. 75). Because they cannot forget the past, these exiles are haunted by the fact that they are merely acting out the parts of previous exiles, the true exiles who came to Spain at the time of the Spanish civil war. Hence even their alienation has become a mask. Barney talks often of his Jewish family background; Chaim is saving his money so that he can go to Israel. This second generation of exiles gazes at the festivals "wearily but indulgently, sitting sad and unknowing in the cafes, sitting, saying nothing and going nowhere, today being only the inevitable disappointment of yesterday's tomorrow, waiting, waiting for something they were at a loss to explain" (Acrobats, p. 33). As in A Choice of Enemies, such expatriates are obsessed by the fact that their own political beliefs appear to be useless:

> Often it appeared to André that he belonged to the last generation of men. A generation not lost and not unfound but sought after zealously, sought after so that it might stand up and be counted, perjuring itself and humanity, sought after by the propagandists of a faltering revolution and the rear-guard of a dying civilization. His intellectual leaders had proven either duds or counterfeits--standing up in the thirties to cheer the revolution hoarsely, and in the fifties sitting down again to write a shy, tinny, blushing yes to capitalistic democracy. (Acrobats, p. 32)

André himself represents the young, inarticulate Canadian who confronts a sophisticated, articulate Europe; his experiences are a sort of odyssey, for he is looking for some value system in which he can believe.[32] "What drives us on . . . is the sense that we haven't tried everything," muses André, "that perhaps somewhere there is God" (Acrobats, p. 22). Alienated from both his companions in Spain and the Canadian artistic scene, which he calls "mediocrity draped in the maple leaf" (Acrobats, p. 79), André is searching for some commitment, some belief; as he puts it, "I must act. There is a need to live--or die, if you like--nobly and with purpose" (Acrobats, p. 73). The crux of the novel comes when André is liberated from this uncertainty by deciding to return to Canada; he has decided to take an active role similar to that of the protagonist in Atwood's Surfacing, and in taking this role he makes a positive commitment to his role as an artist. And yet the end of the novel is deliberately ambiguous. After passing beyond a fragmented vision of himself in which his body is "no longer a well-integrated unit but instead a bunch of ridiculous, unrelated items" (Acrobats, p. 147) towards a more unified, positive vision, André is murdered by Roger Kraus and again appears as one of the lost generation: "His expression was not angry or surprised or benign. It was exhausted but still somewhat eager. As if he was waiting for something which had not yet arrived but could be expected shortly, an abysmal something perhaps" (Acrobats, p. 189). This withdrawal into alienation becomes a cliché of the old sensibility; modern technology is the enemy and the lost generation can find refuge only in its own despair. Instead of trying to relate to shifts in technology, the artist of the old sensibility opposes them, and eventually finds he cannot communicate with his own society.

THE ARTIST OF THE OLD SENSIBILITY WAS A STOCK FIGURE OF PERSECUTION

When the artist of the old sensibility withdrew from his own society, he became a cliché, a stereotype and a figure of fun. In the society of Canadian expatriates and in the Montreal ghetto, the problem was the same. Caught within a microcosm of society, the artist became the victim of his own alienation; he developed a persecution complex that led him into narrower, more specialized forms of experience. Indeed, the artist often became a stereotype in the old sensibility, and was then unable to escape from his self-limited world. Richler was raised in a poor section of Montreal, and was undoubtedly influenced by the limitations of his world. In works such as The Street, Son of a Smaller Hero, and The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz he gives us a vivid picture of an artist of the old sensibility struggling against the confines of his own environment. As we see in the sad tale of Mervyn Kaplansky in The Street, the persecution complex of the alienated artist often subdues whatever creative powers he may possess. The story of Mervyn--often reprinted as "Some Grist for Mervyn's Mill"--provides an introduction to Richler's skeptical view of technological shifts in the modern world.

In this story, Richler adopts the persona of an impressionistic narrator who is naively interested when his family takes in Mervyn Kaplansky, a young writer, as a boarder. Mervyn soon assumes the characteristics of a comic figure, however, for instead of the stereotyped figure of the writer he is only a "short, fat boy with curly black hair, warm wet eyes, and an engaging smile."[33] He works hard, confined to his room, until it becomes apparent that his novel will not be accepted by any publisher. His only publication, it appears, is the short story "A Doll for the Deacon" in the magazine Liberty, and although the narrator's father likes it Mervyn does not regard the story as a true example of his own genius. Finally, when he is unable to publish his novel, Mervyn leaves the narrator's house; he writes a telegram to himself to make it appear as if he has been urgently called away. Within this framework, the story tells us about some attitudes towards the artist in the ghetto, and shows us how the writer himself can become a stereotype.

Mervyn believes that any creative writer is a genius, but he only writes when he feels the right "vibrations." He prepares for this by sleeping well--or, as he calls it, "stocking the unconscious" (Street, p. 93). But the life of the writer is difficult even when he has the right "vibrations," for Mervyn says he is trying to "out-Emile Zola"; he is trying to write a realistic novel about the struggles of the Jewish people, and as he tells the narrator, "never become a wordsmith. Digging ditches would be easier" (Street, p. 94). In the course of the story, it becomes clear that Mervyn himself has become a cliché. When he finds he is unpopular, he explains this by saying "society is naturally hostile to us. . . . I'm in rebellion against society" (Street, p. 99). Hence he separates himself from the working class family he lives with, and muses "no wonder so many artists have been driven to suicide. Nobody understands us. We're not in the rat race" (Street, p.102).

In fact, if Mervyn is trying to write in the tradition of Zola, Dreiser, or James Jones, he is taking the most difficult route. Rather than associating with society or at least observing it realistically, he prefers to retreat into a romantic absorption with his own role as a Byronic figure. "Have you ever looked up at the stars . . . and felt how small and unimportant we are?" he asks the narrator. "Nothing really matters. In terms of eternity our lives are shorter than a cigarette puff" (Street, p. 116). He claims he does not mind being ridiculed, since "for a writer . . . everything is grist to the mill. Nothing is humiliating" (Street, p. 116). And as he points out, if he took a job as most people do, he would only do so in order to gain experience as an artist.

Mervyn's novel is about "the struggles of our people in a hostile society" and is aptly called The Dirty Jews (Street, p. 93). There are rumours that Mervyn has accepted a Hollywood offer for the rights to his book, but the novel is rejected by every publisher who considers it. The first time this happens, Mervyn is confident; as he puts it, "some of the best wordsmiths going have had their works turned down six-seven times before a publisher takes it. Besides, this outfit wasn't for me in the first place" (Street, p. 105). When his book is turned down a second time, Mervyn begins to think his novel may be worthless, and eventually has a nervous breakdown. But the reactions shown by the narrator's parents during this lengthy process are fascinating.

The narrator's mother worships Mervyn and does everything she can to help him in his work. She has literary discussions with him, prepares special food for him, and in general considers him a genius. Although her husband likes Mervyn's story "A Doll for the Deacon," she prefers more intellectual books like Wuthering Heights. When Mervyn reads her a chapter from his book, she says "it's so beautiful, you could die," and she notes that F. J. Kugelman, Montreal correspondent of The Jewish Daily Forward, describes Mervyn as "a very deep writer" (Street, pp. 96-97). Indeed, she is careful never to disturb Mervyn; like most people in the ghetto, she has no knowledge of art or artists, and her own behaviour is a sort of false gentility:

> "Have you ever noticed his hands," she said, and I thought she was going to lecture me about his chewed-up fingernails, but what she said was, "They're artist's hands. Your grandfather had hands like that." If a neighbour dropped in for tea, my mother would whisper, "We'll have to speak quietly," and indicating the tap-tap of the typewriter from the back bedroom, she'd add, "in there, Mervyn is creating." (Street, p. 93)

The narrator's gruff, orthodox father, however, is more interested in Mervyn's rent than in his novel. Originally he thinks Mervyn is an unsuccessful writer, a "long-hair" (Street, p. 97), but as it becomes apparent that Mervyn is a professional writer and may be successful, the father decides he may be able to help. And instead of the false sophistication of his wife he adopts a direct, totally insensitive approach. Clipping items from the newspaper, he gives these to Mervyn as aids in the composition of his novel. After all, as he points out, Hemingway was paid $100,000 for the movie rights for a story, and there is no reason why Mervyn's novel should not be worth at least five stories (Street, p. 102). And he reminds us of the attitude to writing of one Peter Cagney, a joke writer whose remarks are transcribed by Richler in "Answering the Ads":

> "I've written forty million words--78 books--you'd think I'd have made a bloody fortune, wouldn't you? I mean those words aren't stuff that's gone into the wastepaper basket. Published. The lot. Then you take somebody like John Braine, he writes one flipping book--it's serialized in the Express and he's made. Amateurs. Colin Wilson can't even spell. I've got a letter from him, did you knew? Braine writes one book--a flash in the pan, isn't it? I mean for authorship. That's what I stand for. I've written 78 books--no, 84."[34]

Cagney, who describes himself as a "professional," claims to be able to "write a thirty minute television script, complete with technical details, in twenty minutes" (Shovelling Trouble, pp. 128-129). In Mervyn's case, the narrator's father tells his curious friends at Tansky's store that inspiration "has to do with this thing . . . the Muse. On some days, with the Muse, he works better. But on other days . . . " (Street, p. 103). His final suggestion, which Mervyn rejects, is that the young author should refer to specific commercial companies and products in his novel so he can make some extra money:

> "Like if your hero has to fly somewhere, for instance, why use an unnamed airline? Couldn't he go TWA because it's the safest, the best, and maybe he picks up a cutie pie on board? Or if your central character is . . . well, a lush, couldn't he always insist on Seagram's because

> it's the greatest? Get the idea? I could write, say, TWA, Pepsi, Seagram's and Adam's Hats and find out just how much a book plug is worth to them . . ."
> (*Street*, p. 106)

Surrounded by the mother's pretensions and the father's insensitivity, Mervyn is driven out of the house and into a relationship with Molly, a neighbourhood girl whose interest in Mervyn varies according to his apparent success. The first time Mervyn goes out with Molly he proposes marriage; after that she must ask him out, and finally he goes. But their relationship is a failure, and makes it even more apparent why Mervyn cannot relinquish his role as the persecuted artist. As he puts it, "Molly's an insect. Sex is highly over-estimated, you know. It also saps an artist's creative energies" (*Street*, p. 95). He has little interest in Molly and little in the members of the narrator's family who surround him. In his comic egocentricity, he is a satiric figure of what happens to the artist who becomes too concerned with his own image.

IN *SON OF A SMALLER HERO*, RICHLER GIVES US A REALISTIC PICTURE OF THE MONTREAL GHETTO AS MICROCOSM

The artist of the old sensibility was egocentric in his attitude to the environment. Instead of attempting to understand new technologies, he preferred to focus on his own personal problems of morality. In such novels as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*, the artist-hero became convinced that his own moral concerns could not be solved within the confines of a modern technological age. Attempting to view technology in a humanistic way, artists of the old sensibility found they could often take refuge only in traditions of the past. The old sensibility preferred to ignore the new technological environment; it stressed instead the moral problems caused by various technologies. Richler's most important work in this genre is Son of A Smaller Hero, which explores the moral problems faced by the artist-hero of the old sensibility. The protagonist of the novel, Noah Adler, finds that in order to define himself he must rebel against his own traditional upbringing. The Montreal ghetto is the microcosm in which he learns to question the moral values of his family and the efficacy of his religion.

Noah himself is a skeptical, lonely young man who loves his family and yet refuses to take part in its Jewish ceremonies. Disappointed in his upbringing and education, he feels the need to rebel against the suffocating force of his collective family. He wants to be loved by his family and yet fears it; he realizes the disadvantages of his religion and yet can substitute no other. As the novel puts it, "Noah wanted some knowledge of himself that was independent of others."[35] Born a Jew but disenchanted with everything that is Jewish, Noah uses his rebellion against his family to represent his larger rebellion against the accepted values in society. As he points out, "nothing is absolute any longer. There is a choice of beliefs and a choice of truths to go with them. If you choose not to choose them there is no choice at all" (Smaller Hero, p. 99). Indeed, his moral position is similar to that of André in The Acrobats and Norman in A Choice of Enemies, both of whom are searching for belief in a world of shifting values. Theirs is a world of politics; Noah's is one of family traditions:

> The people, the laws, that he had rebelled against, had been replaced by other, less conspicuously false, laws and people while he had been away. That shifting of the ghetto sands seemed terribly unfair to him. If the standard man can be defined by his possessions, then rob his house and you steal his identity. Noah had supposed himself to be a standard man. But his house had been robbed and his identity had been lost. He was shaken. Not only because he felt a need to re-define himself, but because he realized, at last, what all this time he had only been defining himself against.
> (Smaller Hero, p. 203)

Like the characters in Richler's other novels, Noah needs to define himself by means of a personal set of values. He needs a tradition, an ethic: we are told that he "had renounced a world with which he had at least been familiar and no new world had as yet replaced it. He was hungering for an anger or a community or a tradition to which he could relate his experience" (Smaller Hero, p. 72). But he is unable to define himself in terms of his own experiences. His love affair with Miriam, the wife of his university English professor Theo, is doomed; and his knowledge that his father, Wolf Adler, died trying to rescue money rather than the Torah from a burning office makes him even more aware that his society has its own heroes and its own hypocrisy. Noah's own consciousness of beauty makes him wish to leave the atmosphere of the ghetto, but he finds it almost impossible to escape.

As in Adele Wiseman's The Sacrifice, we find that a protagonist is unable to break free of his Jewish past.[36] Knowing that his Jewish community is based on false values and outdated beliefs, Noah tries to break away, yet he is held captive by the forces of the established Jewish tradition. We are given many vivid pictures of the Montreal ghetto; the novel is in part a discussion of Richler's childhood in a fictional form, and the descriptions of Jewish Montreal are surprisingly detailed.[37] No other novel by Richler includes passages of such extensive, detailed sense impressions. This is a world of crap games, rooming houses, pool halls, and corner grocery stores. Jews who work in factories live in cold water flats; successful Jews move away to Outremont, and visit the ghetto to gaze pompously at its inhabitants. "The ghetto of Montreal has no real walls and no true dimensions" (Smaller Hero, p. 14), Richler tells us; for Noah the ghetto represents a state of mind, a reminder of his artistic deficiencies:

> All day long St. Lawrence Boulevard, or Main Street, is a frenzy of poor Jews, who gather there to buy groceries, furniture, clothing and meat. Most walls are plastered with fraying election bills, in Yiddish, French, and English. The street reeks of garlic and quarrels and bill collectors: orange crates, stuffed full of garbage and decaying fruit, are piled slipshod in most alleys. Swift children gobble pilfered plums, slower cats prowl the fish market. After the water truck has passed, the odd dead rat can be seen floating down the gutter followed fast by rotten apples, cigar butts, chunks of horse manure and a terrifying zigzag of flies.
> (Smaller Hero, p. 15)

Noah's own family is itself a reflection of the stultifying forces in the ghetto. Both his brother Shliome and his sister Ida are rebellious and dislike authority; his mother, Leah, gains her only strength from her husband's supposed heroism. As the novel puts it, "the Adlers lived in a cage and that cage, with all its faults, had justice and a kind of felicity. A man knew where he stood" (Smaller Hero, pp. 39-40). For Noah and his siblings, however, this is still a cage. Their Jewish acquaintances are only representative of the forces keeping the ghetto together, and Noah views them as strangers, though he knows them well. He has little use for such men as his rich uncle Max, the culture addict Dr. Harry Goldenberg, or the Jewish shopkeeper Panofsky with his facile Marxist slogans. Indeed, these men represent variations of what he might one day become.

Even the patriarch of Noah's family, the formidable Melech Adler, appears as a dishonest, vindictive man. The son of a scribe, Melech has worked hard at his scrap-metal business and is upset that his children do hot follow after him. As he puts it, "this is my house and I am the boss" (Smaller Hero,p. 25), but it becomes clear in the course of the novel that he has little control over his children. Although he often tells them to pay attention to Jewish customs, they ignore him. As the novel proceeds, we see Melech becoming more and more feeble, and his justifications for his own creed become less and less effective. His final lie to Noah about the contents of the box Wolf

Adler died to save indicates the break-up of the patriarchal Jewish family. This break-up is, of course, made more emphatic by the behaviour of Wolf himself, a weak, nervous man who fears Melech but does not really respect him. Noted only for his off-colour jokes and inane business schemes and inventions, Wolf keeps a diary in his own private code. He blames his wife Leah for his disagreements with Melech, and at one point almost kills the old man out of frustration. But like the other characters in the Jewish ghetto, he does not understand the reasons for his frustration. Hence he can only be suspicious of Noah and his attempt to escape; as he tells his son, "you're no longer a Jew and you'll never become one of them. A nothing . . . " (Smaller Hero, p. 140).

Wolf Adler's death itself is a symbol of why Noah finds it necessary to rebel against the tradition. At Wolf's burial the rabbi tells the assembled mourners that "Wolf's passing has glory, my friends. Honour. He died a Jew" (Smaller Hero, p. 173). And as Noah realizes, the Jews have shed their individuality in devotion to Israel; they have been "trading in anguish and abandoning freedom for membership" (Smaller Hero, p. 30). He himself realizes that there are many types of Jews just as there are many types of men, and as he points out with regard to the Nazi concentration camps, responsible for his family's hatred of the Germans, "the important thing is not that they burned Jews but that they burned men" (Smaller Hero, p. 78). The members of his family have surrendered their humanity in their devotion to an ideology just as left-wing expatriates in A Choice of Enemies preferred to do. Both those of the left wing and the Jews believe that they are members of persecuted minority groups; their mistake is to concentrate more on the ideology of the group than on personal understanding.

Richler told Nathan Cohen that "one of the things I was most concerned with in Son of a Smaller Hero was that it seems to me that class loyalties in Montreal were much stronger than Jewish loyalties or traditions; that the middle-class Jew has much more in common with the middle-class Gentile than he has with the Jew who works for him in his factory."[38] The world into which Noah tries to escape is both Gentile and of a class different from his own. His friend Theo, who decides to mould Noah into one of his literary disciples, is a tired, ineffective man who finds that his Oxford liberalism is ineffective in the Montreal literary scene. A failure as a poet and critic, Theo talks incessantly of books and learning and tries to interest Noah in a life of culture, yet we become aware that he himself is a failure as husband, lover, and friend. His life is a schedule, for he is obsessed with maintaining his own image as a literary man. His wife Miriam, however, provides Noah with a vision of escape from the ghetto: she appears to Noah as a sophisticated, modern woman who offers him everything his own culture does not contain. But we see that she is in fact attracted to Noah only because of his ruthlessness, his vitality, qualities she does not find in her husband. She herself was once poor, and feels she understands Noah; but she becomes dependant on him, and their relationship dissolves.

Neither Theo nor Miriam can offer Noah any lasting escape from the ghetto in which he has grown up. When Noah first falls in love with Miriam, he views their love as an alternative to the ghetto: "He felt that he was no longer merely a rebel. An iconoclast. He was beginning to develop a morality of his own" (Smaller Hero, p. 119). Although Noah decides to leave for Europe, he is actually only exchanging one microcosm for another. The artist-hero of the old sensibility had few choices when faced with the technologies of the modern age; he tended to retreat, to withdraw further into yet another form of alienation. Feelings of rebellion, non-conformity, and disillusionment are merely transplanted to another locale, and there is still little attempt to understand technology itself. Indeed, in Richler's subsequent novel, A Choice of Enemies, there is further implied the rejection of North American technology, politics, and moral values.

THE ALIENATED ARTIST-HERO OF THE OLD SENSIBILITY WAS CONCERNED WITH SURVIVAL IN A MECHANIZED, DECADENT WORLD

While the new sensibility suggests simultaneity and celebration, the old sensibility often seemed based on concentrated hostility and despair. The technological environment was hostile, and it corrupted man. Relationships between men and women were merely an antidote to the constant threat of a mechanized universe. Ernest Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls, for example, includes a love affair set against the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. Indeed, human relationships in the old sensibility were often defined by masks, disguises; there was little of the freedom we associate with the new morality of the sixties. This tendency of the old sensibility to operate through disguises is well documented in Richler's A Choice of Enemies (1957), a novel typifying how characters of the old sensibility struggled to survive in a decadent world. The men and women in the book are clichés, stereotypes; they retreat into their own society, and attempt to ignore the problems of the external environment. Richler himself told Graeme Gibson that the novel was concerned with the "destruction of innocence and the death of beauty,"[39] and what is most clear is the need of the old sensibility for moral values to set against the drastic changes in a technological society.

The book describes a group of expatriate North American film-makers living in London and their activities; many are Americans who have been blacklisted in Hollywood because of alleged connections with the Communist party, and the protagonist Norman Price is an ex-university professor who resigned rather than testify about his political beliefs. He and his left-wing friends are failures; they find that their political beliefs are no longer viable. As Richler pointed out to Nathan Cohen:

> I think what is emerging from this breakdown is a much more complicated and closely held personal system of values. . . . I think we are coming back to a very personal and basic set of values because the exterior values have failed. There has been a collapse of values, whether that value was God or Marx or gold. We are living at a time when superficially life seems meaningless, and we have to make value judgements all the time, it seems in relation to nothing.[40]

Richler told Cohen that "what I am looking for are the values with which in this time a man can live with honour."[41] And although all his novels are concerned with this theme, A Choice of Enemies is probably his most bitter discussion of it.[42] When Richler first visited London, he met a group of people who, as he points out, "had bet their lives on politics, and something happened to them, the politics is no longer there."[43] The main conflict in A Choice of Enemies is between Norman, the shy, introverted Canadian scriptwriter, and Ernst, a German political refugee who murders Norman's brother and eventually falls in love with Norman's girlfriend Sally, another Canadian exile. Like André Bennett of The Acrobats, Norman is the virtuous man in a world which has forgotten how to love. His attitude towards the world is one of disillusionment, resignation; he is sympathetic towards others, but his life-style is passive, restrained. Unable to teach at a university, he is writing a critical book on John Dryden, but seems unable to finish it. As Joey, the wife of his expatriate friend Charlie Lawson, points out, "Norman has never faced a crisis in his life. He's always run away."[44] For aside from his interest in left-wing writers like Trotsky, Koestler, and Marx, Norman has little left to believe in. As he himself puts it, "it seems to me, that aside from our political virtues, people like us never had anything else" (Enemies, p. 235). He is the typical intellectual in a political world which does not appreciate his intelligence, and he realizes that he uses politics as only compensation for his own unhappiness.

In the course of the novel, we see that Norman finally realizes what his real enemies are: pretensions, greed, and the lust for power.[45] These qualities are symbolized in the novel by Norman's opposition to Ernst, the quiet, vigilant refugee whose morality is so different from his own. A former member of the Hitler Youth, Ernst has been forced to leave Germany because his father would not cooperate with the political authorities. And with this legacy Ernst is presented as a trapped, doomed wanderer; like his father, he "wanders from zone to zone. He will not stop until the day he dies" (Enemies, p. 189). He is often presented as the prototype of a society that is in the process of disintegration, and seems similar to the amoral persons we find in stories of the criminal underworld. When Sally asks him why he killed Nicky, he says "there is no right or wrong. There are conditions, rewards, punishments, and sides, but that's all" (Enemies, p. 129). And as Ernst himself knows, he is a night person, a doomed one:

> The West End, it seemed to him, would yield better pickings, but once loose on the streets

> again Ernst was immediately struck by the brutalized faces of the spivs and whores who worked the different corners. Berlin, London, Paris, it was all the same: squalor under the winking neon. These were his people. Night squeezed them like blackheads out of the face of the city. In spite of his fine clothes nobody bothered to proposition Ernst. He recognized them; they recognized him. Another week, two at the most, and he would be coughing again. One of these days his luck would break and, like the rest of them, he would do his stretch in prison. (Enemies, pp. 135-136)

As we see in A Choice of Enemies, the society of the intellectual left in which these characters move is no different from any other society. It has its own petty disagreements, loyalties, and failures; but these are made more emphatic by the fact that the intellectual left has always been rather arrogant in its social criticism. "What I was trying to get at there," Richler told Graeme Gibson, "was the narrow and ugly contempt groups of intellectuals have for the intellectually unwashed."[46] The novel shows us many portraits of cynical, arrogant exiles who are intolerant in their criticism of American foreign policy, the American "dream," and generally the North American artistic scene. Sally discovers to her astonishment that the "enlightened" left is similar in many ways to the "less intelligent groups it despised" (Enemies, p. 55). As she finds out, "you didn't wear a badge with your first name on it, you weren't asked the name of your home town, but your contributions were 'concrete,' your faith 'progressive,' and your enemies 'reactionary'" (Enemies, p. 55). As Richler told Nathan Cohen, "in reality they are just as intolerant as the people who are in power, without the authority which makes them a little worse, a little less magnanimous."[47]

In spite of their arrogance, most of the novel's characters are in fact failures. Charlie Lawson, the hack scriptwriter from Hollywood who convinces himself that he is an idealistic non-conformist, is unable to find work and sits at home waiting for phone calls. He thinks of "the friends who had turned into enemies and how everyone, himself included, tried and tried and tried and only ended up hurting each other worse" (Enemies, p. 242). Horton, the abusive journalist who writes unintelligible articles for Marxist journals, has a childish fight with Norman at a party. The most grotesque character in the novel is the effeminate Karp, a Jewish survivor of the Nazi concentration camps who thinks he has solved the problem of how to survive in a politically decadent world. To overcome what he believes is the disadvantage of being a Jew, he decides to convert to Catholicism and collects a large library of intellectual books so that he can broaden his interests. He has a plan for survival, but it involves rejecting his religious faith; as Norman tells him, "the best ones were killed, Karp. Only the conniving, evil ones like you survived" (Enemies, p. 151). Neither Karp nor Ernst can understand that their alienation is a product of their common humanity rather than their racial and religious affiliations. Richler implies that we are all Jews, all Germans, and that we use our political systems as conveniences to prevent us from facing the truths about ourselves.

The only character in the novel who appears in any positive sense is Sally, the innocent Canadian expatriate who is appalled when Ernst tells her of his belief in political expediency. But even her relationships are those of frustration and alienation. Her affair with Norman is informed by Norman's fear of rejection and sexual failure; her affair with Ernst is overlaid with the knowledge that theirs is a doomed relationship, for Ernst is a criminal. Yet these relationships are symptomatic of the spiritual malaise which envelops the novel. As Norman puts it:

> This, he thought, was surely an age of silence. A time of collisions. A place strewn with wrecks. This time of opinions, battle-stations, and no absolutes, was also a time to consolidate. This time of no heroes but hyperbole, where treason was only loyalty looked at closely, and faith, honour, and courage had become the small change of crafty politicians, was also a time to persevere. To persevere was a most serious virtue.
> (Enemies, p. 253)

Or as he says at another time, "we seem to belong to a world of broken promises and angers valued like valentines. A world that's done" (Enemies, p. 153). Alliances of all types have been discredited, and each man must depend upon himself to develop a coherent philosophy of values. Although man's loyalties are no longer clear, he must choose between the humanistic values of those like Norman and the expediency of his friend Sonny, who tells him that "in this world you've got to make a choice of enemies or you just can't live" (Enemies, p. 126). As Richler told Graeme Gibson:

> . . . all our freedom is, you know, moves us into chaos . . . and . . . we do live in chaos without any agreed-upon system of values which we can refer to, and so the more we disentangle ourselves from the hypocrisies of our background, the more chaotic our life becomes. Now possibly too much was thrown overboard . . . we've discarded everything or attempted to discard everything, and maybe it's necessary to look again. . . . Increasingly we know each system contains its own injustices, and any of that social justice which I presume we're both for solves only superficial problems. 48

Writers of the old sensibility resisted the new freedom given to man by electronic technology, and preferred to view technology as the enemy responsible for the injustices of society. Artists of the old sensibility looked to the past for inspiration; the new writers use technology itself as a primary source. In Richler's next work, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, he begins to move towards an awareness of the new sensibility. Instead of withdrawing into alienation, the artist moves into the technological universe, and begins to define himself by it although he may still resist it.

RICHLER'S RESISTANCE TO THE NEW SENSIBILITY LESSENS AS HE PLACES DUDDY KRAVITZ IN A TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSE

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz (1959) might be called a prelude to Richler's finest novel, St. Urbain's Horseman, which marks him as a novelist of the new sensibility. In St. Urbain's Horseman, Richler moves beyond his role of the conventional satirist who is skeptical of the new technology and its effects on man. He becomes a true comic artist of the new sensibility; sensitive to the moral dilemmas of man in the electric age, he accepts the new morality and its problems. The techniques Richler uses in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz lead into the achievement of the later novel. Rejecting the conventions of the realistic novel for a satirical form, Richler explores the idea of survival in a technological environment. As Elizabeth Waterston puts it, "Duddy, as modern hero in a McLuhanite age, moves through adventures dominated by technological devices: telephones, trains, taxis, newspapers, comic books."[49] The alienated man can now manipulate the media; he extends his power through technology and hence defines his existence. Richler's portrait of Duddy Kravitz is, of course, satirical; and the book implies the author's own criticism of the way Duddy manipulates the media to serve his own selfish ends. But the important fact is that Richler sets his hero within a world of shifting, multiplying technologies; in earlier works such as The Acrobats, Son of a Smaller Hero, and A Choice of Enemies, he had been concerned with the old sensibility and its retreat from a technological world.

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz is a transitional work in the Richler canon. Like the heroes of Richler's earlier novels, Duddy Kravitz is alienated from North American society, and finds he must break traditional family relationships in order to achieve success. When we first see him, he is a small, narrow-chested boy of fifteen from the Jewish ghetto in Montreal who is crafty, irreligious, and often obscene: "Where Duddy Kravitz sprung from the boys grew up dusty and sad, spiky also, like the grass beside the railroad tracks."[50] He and his friends spend most of their time tormenting their teachers at school: they send ambulances, taxis, and movers to the teachers' homes, and threaten them with obscene phone calls. Gaining strength from their gang, the "Warriors," they eventually threaten one teacher's invalid wife and finally cause his nervous breakdown. As Duddy and his friends proceed with these pranks, however, we become aware that Duddy does them for a reason: he wants to be a success, and he does not care for appearances. As the novel puts it, "Duddy wanted to be somebody. Another Boy Wonder maybe. Not a loser, certainly" (Duddy Kravitz, p. 63). When his grandfather Simcha tells him that to be a success he must own land, since "a man without land is nobody" (Duddy Kravitz, p. 49), and tells Duddy about the failure of his own relatives, Duddy decides that he must buy some land and become rich, though he is not sure of the correct way to go about it. And Duddy becomes obsessed with this goal:

> Look at me, he thought, take a good look because maybe I'm dirt now. Maybe I've never been to Paris and I don't know a painter from a horse's ass. I can't play tennis like the other guys here, but I don't go around spilling ketchup in other guys' beds either. I don't trick guys into crazy promises when they're drunk. I don't speak dirty like you either . . . You're sorry for making a fool out of me. Gee whiz, my heart bleeds. Take a good look, you dirty bitch. Maybe I'm dirt today. . . . But you listen here, kiddo. It's not always going to be like this. If you want to bet on something then bet on me. I'm going to be a somebody and that's for sure.
>
> (Duddy Kravitz, p. 94)

Driven by visions of the life in Westmount and at the resort hotel where he works in the summer, Duddy becomes an aggressive entrepreneur. He sells stamps, comic books, underwear, and replies to advertisements in The New York Times. He identifies with the affluent founders of Coca-Cola and Reader's Digest. Perhaps, he thinks, he could be successful as the owner of a movie rental business or as a newspaper publisher. These adolescent efforts, however, are merely a prelude to what occurs after Duddy discovers that he may be able to buy up the land around Lac St. Pierre and develop it for tourists. As he tells his friend Yvette, "I'm going to build a children's camp and a hotel here. I want to make a town" (Duddy Kravitz, p. 100). After he discovers this land he has a definite goal, and his business efforts become even more frenetic. While he is trying to buy various pieces of property he dreams about his land, visits it occasionally, and keeps a map which he secretly colours in with each new acquisition. The schemes he concocts to raise money for his land are, indeed, an indictment of free enterprise. They usually involve his taking advantage of others. Duddy is unable to buy his way into television, so he continues to pay his way by selling soap and driving his father's taxi at night. Then he decides to become a film producer; he founds "Dudley Kane Enterprises," subscribes to Variety, and convinces his family's friends that he can make films of bar-mitzvahs. This brings him a certain amount of money, but he is always conscious of the mortgage payments he must make on his property.

Not all of Duddy's enterprises, however, are as innocent as his bar-mitzvah films. He cleverly takes advantage of his epileptic friend Virgil by repaying him only in part for some pinball machines he has sold to Duddy; and then Duddy finally forges Virgil's name on a cheque to obtain the money needed to complete his acquisition of land. These are no longer childish pranks, it seems, for Duddy can only succeed by destroying the lives of others. As family friend Mr. Cohen puts it, "it's a battlefield. I didn't make it (I wasn't asked). I've got to live, that's all" (Duddy Kravitz, p. 268). Duddy even sells the antiques his deceased Uncle Benjy left to him in order to pay for his land. All traditions must be jettisoned in his drive for success.

The novel is also an indictment of what success does to the man who succeeds. When Duddy begins to be successful he decides that he needs to import some "culture." As he puts it, "intellectual stimulation is good for you" (Duddy Kravitz, p. 226). Thus he begins to cultivate a circle of bohemian friends, with whom he discusses the ideas of Lewis Mumford and Le Corbusier, writers he cannot really understand. He buys Beethoven's nine symphonies, listens to them in order, and begins to collect records of the works of Schubert, Mozart, and Brahms. Next on his list of acquisitions are a set of golf clubs and, hopefully, a rich wife. But as we might expect, Duddy cannot long maintain this life-style. Even as he becomes successful he has a nervous breakdown, for he feels guilty about how he has sold out his friends and dreams that his creditors are pursuing him. Although he is able to declare bankruptcy and then to proceed until he has finished buying his land, we feel that he will ultimately be unable to escape from his own feelings of guilt and persecution. "I've got the mark of Cain on me " (Duddy Kravitz, p. 257), he cries in a dream, and ultimately it seems this will prove to be true.

The victims Duddy leaves behind him are reflections of his own crippled condition.[51] Even the epitome of success, the conservative, aristocratic Hugh Thomas Calder, becomes the victim in one of Duddy's shady business transactions. But the character who most effectively shows the results of Duddy's amoral philosophy is the grotesque Jerry Dingleman, or the "Boy Wonder" as he is frequently called. A mysterious figure similar in some ways to the Horseman in St. Urbain's Horseman, Dingleman is a son of the ghetto who has succeeded but has not forgotten his family ties. Various myths circulate about his sexual prowess, his connections with organized crime, and his relationship with his unhappy ex-fiancee. Yet Dingleman is a cripple, a polio victim; once handsome, he has become a sort of monster, and he is a personification of what Duddy will become:

> Polio wrought immense physical changes in Jerry Dingleman. At thirty he was no longer a handsome man. His shoulders and chest developed enormously and his legs dwindled to thin bony sticks. He

> put on lots of weight. Everywhere he went the Boy Wonder huffed and puffed and had to wipe the sweat from the back of his rolled hairy neck with a handkerchief. The bony head suddenly seemed massive. The grey inquisitor's eyes whether hidden behind dark glasses--an affectation he abhorred--or flashing under rimless ones unfailingly led people to look over his shoulder or down at the floor. His curly black hair had dried. His mouth began to turn down sharply at the corners. (Duddy Kravitz, pp. 132-133)

Although Duddy is himself victimized by Dingleman in an abortive smuggling expedition, it is clear that at the end of the novel Duddy has the upper hand. Indeed, he has become expert at Dingleman's own methods in the pursuit of success, and in his own way is another Boy Wonder. And as we can also see, he is equally corrupt.

The most poignant of Duddy's victims, and the most tragic, is probably Virgil, the innocent, naive epileptic who finally has an accident in the old truck Duddy gives him as payment for his pin-ball machines. A failed poet who ironically compares himself with his classical namesake, Virgil identifies with Duddy because they are both members of persecuted minority groups. As Virgil puts it, epileptics are "a persecuted minority. Just like the Jews and the Negroes" (Duddy Kravitz, p. 208). Since he has never had a job he is thankful when Duddy gives him one, at a miniscule rate of pay, and does not realize that Duddy is taking advantage of him. He even sends Duddy a copy of his magazine about epileptics, The Crusader, and asks for Duddy's comments. Because he is so concerned with his own self-pity, Virgil does not realize that he is the main loser in Duddy's rise to success.

Others in the novel, however, are not so obtuse. One of Duddy's early victims, the teacher Mr. MacPherson, expresses it well when he tells Duddy, "you'll go far, Kravitz. You're going to go very far" (Duddy Kravitz, p. 41). Yvette, the friend of Duddy's who falls in love with Virgil, finally realizes what is happening to Virgil and holds Duddy responsible. Duddy's wealthy, unhappy, Uncle Benjy, who finally dies of cancer, writes a letter to Duddy in which he says "there's a brute inside you, Duddel--a regular behemoth--and this being such a hard world it would be the easiest thing for you to let it overpower you" (Duddy Kravitz, p. 280). He realizes what Duddy is, and what he will become; and most of all he knows that the relentless pursuit of possessions does not bring happiness. His own pretentious, pseudo-English existence and disastrous marriage provide a few obvious examples.

Indeed, the only praiseworthy characteristic Duddy shows is his loyalty to his family. He intercedes on behalf of his brother Lenny, a medical student who has performed an unsuccessful abortion on a society girl, and he often returns to the ghetto to talk to his father, Max Kravitz, a gruff, anxious man who believes that the Boy Wonder is the epitome of success. Full of nostalgia for the past, Max is anxious for Duddy to get started as a success, perhaps in the footsteps of the Boy Wonder, and in fact he is impressed when Dingleman offers to go into partnership with Duddy. And Duddy has been successful in coming to terms with his technological universe; his expert manipulation of the media has made him a hero. The amoral quality of his exploits, however, emphasizes Richler's own suspicion of success in a technological world. He moves towards the new sensibility, but still seems reluctant to define his characters by it. As in his prose writing, he accepts the influences of the new technology, but remains opposed to many aspects of that universe.

RICHLER'S PROSE SHOWS HIS INTEREST IN A GLOBAL RATHER THAN A STRICTLY NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

> "Being a Canadian writer abroad offers a number of useful perks," Richler confessed four years ago, in The New York Review. I have, over the years, been turning over a useful penny in the why-have-you-left-Canada interview." A useful penny is altogether too modest. As one leading Canadian editor says, "Mordecai has really built a thriving cottage industry out of knocking Canada."
>
> But "after thirteen almost uninterrupted years abroad," Richler conceded in the same essay, "I no longer understood the idiom. Doomed to always be a foreigner in England, I was now in danger of finding Canada foreign too." Never mind: mere ignorance never prevents a real pro from turning a Useful Penny. Articles continued to stream from our self-appointed interpreter to the world, the Just Add Hot Water and Serve expert on Canada.[52]

The free flow of information in the new sensibility is not limited by national boundaries. The world of The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz is North American rather than Canadian, and Richler's last novel, St. Urbain's Horseman, is actually set in England. As a journalist, Richler has written on a variety of topics; and one of his favourite targets is Canadian nationalism. Although he has now returned to Montreal, he works as the Canadian agent for the American-based Book-of-the-Month-Club, and presumably maintains close ties with other internationalist writers. His journalism sets out his views on nationalism in a rather humourous way, but the Canadian who supports Canadian writers often becomes the object of Richler's ridicule. Yet as Donald Cameron recently pointed out, Richler actually "knows about Canada in retrospect and as a tourist."[53] As Richler himself says in the essay "Expo 67":

> After thirteen almost uninterrupted years abroad, I now realized the move I had made with such certainty at the age of twenty-five had exacted a considerable price. Some foggy, depressing nights it seemed to me I had come full circle. Many years ago my parents emigrated from Poland to Canada, to Montreal, where I grew up ashamed of their Yiddish accents. Now I had seemingly settled in London, where my own children (spoiled, ungrateful, enjoying an easier childhood than I had, etc. etc.) found my American accent just as embarrassing.[54]

But as Richler also tells us, "I have, through the years, been turning over a useful penny in the why-have-you-left-Canada interview, that is to say, once a year I make a fool of myself on TV for a fee" (Hunting Tigers, p. 24). In his hostility towards various aspects of Canadian nationalism he often seems foolish in print as well, though often he is perceptive in discussing commercial exploitation of the Canadian psyche. Expo 67 provides him with a focal point. The World's Fair is, he assures us, "awfully good fun and in the best possible taste" (Hunting Tigers, p. 32). But the cultural effects on literature are often unfortunate, he believes, where one finds "a mountain of non-books, from the reasonably priced Life library-like Canadian Centennial Library (Great Canadians, Great Canadian Writing, Great Canadian Sports Stories, etc.), through a Beginning Reader's McGraw-Hill series on the 10 provinces, to the over-priced and pretentious To Everything There Is A Season, a picture book by Roloff Beny" (Hunting Tigers, p. 28).

Although Richler appeared to enjoy visiting Expo, most of his comments ridicule the cultural histrionics of other Canadians who supported it. Politicians, advertising slogans, and the Canadian Author's Association are among his targets, and some of his most caustic comments refer to the deficiencies of the British and American pavilions at Expo. But as usual, his concentration is on the cultural smugness produced by nationalism, and most of his remarks are variations on this theme. Prime Minister Pearson represents for him the epitome of dullness. And Hugo McPherson, one of our most innovative and respected literary critics, seems to symbolize for Richler the essentially derivative nature of Canadian life in the sixties:

> Hugo McPherson, professor of Canadian and American studies at the University of Western Ontario until recently and now head of the National Film Board, said in an interview: "We have our own 'scene' in Canada now. . . . It's no longer fashionable, the way it used to be, for Canadians to knock everything Canadian. Perhaps Expo will be the event we'll all remember as the roadmark. I think it's going to be a vast Canadianizing force, not only in Quebec but all across the country. There's a new feeling of national gaiety and pride at Expo. . . . "
>
> Others go even further, demanding an alarmingly high emotional return from what is after all only a world's fair. A good one, maybe even the most enjoyable one ever. However, within it there lies

> merely the stuff of a future nostalgic musical, not the myth out of which a nation is forged. Unless it is to be a Good Taste Disneyland.
> (Hunting Tigers, p. 36)

In many of his essays, Richler seems to find it necessary to adopt a persona resembling an internationalist Duddy Kravitz in order to describe the Canadian cultural scene. Like any satirist, he uses distortion and magnification to make his arguments more emphatic. In "Maple Leaf Culture Time," he comments on the state of Canadian writing and literary criticism. His remarks seem rather dated, but they do tell us some of the reasons he himself left Canada as a young writer. He points out correctly that Morley Callaghan has been ignored by Canadian critics, while "lesser writers, all of them world-famous in Canada, are blowing the dust off early manuscripts and digging old letters out of the attic, mindful of the burgeoning market in raw Canadiana" (Shovelling Trouble, p. 145). His main attack is directed at those who wish to prove that Canadian literature has a tradition of nineteenth century masterpieces. But historical critics of Canadian literature are in the minority, and Richler seems rather out of touch with current work in Canadian criticism here. In "O Canada," he claims that the Canadian writer once suffered "a wave of enlightened CBC radio and TV plays which educated the public to the fact that we were not all notoriously heavy drinkers, like William Faulkner, or queers, like Jean Genet. We strung words together sort of, but we were regular fellers: Canadians" (Hunting Tigers, pp. 14-15).

When he was a student at Sir George Williams University, he says, there was a course in Canadian literature:

> . . . the text was mimeographed and a typical assignment was for a student to list all the books ever written about the Hudson's Bay Co., noting the dimensions, number of pages, and photographs. Now there are a number of books, most of them embarrassingly boosterish, about Canadian writing, and there is at least one serious quarterly, the bilingual Canadian Literature, that is exclusively--no, quixotically--devoted to the study of Canadian writing past and present. . . . Since then a real Canadian book club has been formed, with monthly selections that run from Malcolm Lowry's Ultramarine to Love and Peanut Butter ("Lesley Conger's warm and lively account of the trials of being a wife, mother and writer in a wild Vancouver household."); and there is a worthy and useful paperback library of Canadian, um, classics. Blue chip Leacocks, some good Callaghan, and rather too many of our frontier day unreadables indecently exhumed.
>
> (Hunting Tigers, pp. 15-16)

"Canadian culture, and criticism thereof," Richler says in "O Canada," "is clearly a growth industry" (Hunting Tigers, p. 16). But as in his novels, he explores the negative aspects of this and ignores the positive ones. Most Canadian writers do not have his international reputation, and do not publish in London and New York, but many of our younger writers would not wish to. In fact, much work done by the smaller presses in Canada--Hurtig Publishers, New Press, and House of Anansi, for instance--is of higher quality than the work of foreign firms, though these independent presses have, of course, smaller runs. Many of the historical reprints now appearing have great historical interest. Indeed, criticisms like Richler's have a debilitating effect on interest in new Canadian publication and writing. By his standards, it seems, Ulysses itself might be criticized because it was originally published at Sylvia Beach's bookshop, "Shakespeare and Company," in Paris in 1922. (And as Richler tells us in the essay "Making It," he admires Ulysses (Shovelling Trouble, p. 99).) His satirical remarks are always witty, always interesting, but his reference point is the international set rather than Canadian literary society, and thus he frequently turns his "useful penny" by attacking values he has ceased to understand or respect. As Donald Cameron points out, "Canada may change, but never Richler's criticism."[55] Almost twenty years ago, one recalls, Richler warned Nathan Cohen about the "danger of young writers being overwhelmed by the CBC and by the Establishment and by the universities."[56]

But for a man so annoyed by cultural life in Canada, Richler is still oddly obsessed by his own critical reputation back home. His books are published by McClelland and Stewart, the largest independent Canadian publisher, and he has won the Governor-General's award several times. Yet when he is given recognition in Canada, his attitude is rather snide. In "Etes-vous Canadian," he describes the occasion when he received the Governor-General's Award in 1969. He accepted the award, he explains, with mixed feelings. When the novel for which he was to receive the award, Cocksure, was published in Canada, "the reviewer in the Montreal Star revealed that I had churned out an obvious pot-boiler with all the lavatory words. The man who pronounces on books in the New Brunswick Daily Gleaner put me down for a very filthy fellow. . . . Others denounced me as a pornographer. And now the ultimate symbol of correctitude in our country, the GG himself, would actually reward me for being obscene" (Shovelling Trouble, pp. 152-153). His description of the ceremony is worth quoting in full:

> The speech Mr. Michener read to us from small cards made for some nervous smiles and at least one giggle from the assembled literati. Observing that all but one of the six award winners was from Quebec, he noted that this might not be a coincidence. "Politics in Quebec today are tense . . . social order is in the process of rapid change and upheaval. This is the atmosphere which stirs people to write more and sometimes better, and to produce exciting paintings, sculpture, theatre, and films."
>
> Alas, the writings of Cohen and Marie-Claire Blais are equally non-political. They have been living in the United States for years, and I am normally rooted in London.
>
> Finally, the award winners were summoned to the Governor-General one by one to accept leather-bound copies of their work signed by Mr. Michener. When my turn came, the Governor-General asked me, "Etes-vous canadien?"
>
> Startled, I said, "Oui."
>
> He then went on to congratulate me fulsomely in French. Is it possible, I thought, appalled, that the Governor-General is a covert separatist? If not, why, when I answered yes to his question, had he assumed I was necessarily French-speaking? The mind boggled. In any event, once he was done, I said, "Merci." I did not correct the Governor-General. In my case, it was noblesse oblige.
>
> (Shovelling Trouble, pp. 154-155)

RICHLER USES THE RESOURCES OF POPULAR CULTURE TO EXPLORE THE JEWISH THEME

Just as the new sensibility de-emphasizes national boundaries and divisions between nations, so it seeks to make available to the serious writer the vast resources of popular culture. If a writer is to explore a moral theme, he is likely to do so on a universal rather than a strictly national basis. Dave Godfrey's The New Ancestors, for example, could refer to the experiences of any colonial nation. Moral issues become global rather than regional; the new writers use the resources of the technological environment to produce new art forms. Much of Richler's prose writing is concerned with Jewish experience, and indeed most characters in Richler's novels explore certain aspects of Jewish perception. As the world grows increasingly chaotic, Richler the satirist describes the problems of members of a minority group. The new sensibility implies commitment, participation; and again we see how Richler uses certain aspects of the new sensibility while still remaining opposed to others.

He has written various satirical essays to illustrate certain aspects of Jewish perception. In "The Catskills" he describes the poor taste ("kitsch") of a Jewish resort, and he has perceptive comments to make in his essay describing a visit to Israel, "This Year in Jerusalem." He has also written excellent review essays on two Jewish-American writers, Norman Mailer and Bernard Malamud. Richler's interest in the Jewish theme, however, often makes him somewhat myopic in his approach to life and literature. The same Jewish jokes will appear time after time in situation and dialogue; at times Richler seems very close to the humour of Leo Rosten's The Education of Hyman Kaplan or of Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint. This is not necessarily a fault, but we do become rather tired of reading about Duddy Kravitz and his exhuberant pranks, and we sometimes wonder if Richler is limited by his own point of view. In two of his essays on Jewish themes, "Jews in Sport" and "Bond," it seems as if Richler deliberately adopts the role of Jewish Avenger, as does Hyman Rosen in Cocksure, as a satirical device allowing him to comment on the role of any stereotyped member of a minority group.

The essay "Jews in Sport" is ostensibly a review of The Encyclopedia of Jews in Sports, by Bernard Postal, Jesse Silver and Roy Silver (Hunting Tigers, p. 54). This is evidently an entertaining book, a "'noteworthy contribution to mankind's ever-growing quest for knowledge' according to the jacket flap" (Hunting Tigers, p. 54), and was written to refute the idea that the Jew is "a physical coward and a stranger to athletics" (Hunting Tigers, p. 55). But according to Richler the book is "rotten with proof of Jewish duplicity and athletic ineptitude" (Hunting Tigers, p. 55). He quotes the following entries:

> "COHEN, HYMAN, 'HY'. Pitcher, b. Jan. 29, 1931 in Brooklyn, N. Y. Played for Chicago Cubs in 1955. Total games: 7. Pitching record: 0-0. Right-hander."
>
> "HERTZ, STEVE ALLAN. Infielder, b. Feb. 26, 1945 in Dayton, Ohio. Played for Houston in 1964. Total games: 5. Batting Average: .000."
>
> (Hunting Tigers, p. 55)

Richler suggests that "in order to fill only 526 pages with Jewish athletic 'Achievement' Mssrs. Postal, Silver and

Silver were driven to scraping the bottom of the barrel" (Hunting Tigers, p. 55). Assuming the mask of the discontented member of a minority group, he suggests that the Encyclopedia might well be useful in the hands of an anti-Semite. Indeed, according to the Encyclopedia, the first player to take money for playing baseball, the first real professional, was a Jew, Lipman E. "Lip" Pike, whose name appeared in a box score immediately after his bar-mitzvah. Many Jews who write about sports, men like Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, and Budd Schulberg, are not mentioned. But Larry Ziedal, Richler's "favourite Jewish defenceman" in the National Hockey League, is quoted in the book as saying: "When you're the only Jew in the bloody game . . . you have to prove you can take the rough stuff more than the average player" (Hunting Tigers, p. 57). Finally Richler suggests topics for other encyclopedias on "Jewish Drunks, High School Dropouts, and Thugs from Noah to today" as well as "a compilation of Famous Jewish Homosexuals, Professional and Amateur, Throughout History" (Hunting Tigers, p. 57).

The second part of "Jews in Sport" examines the career of Sandy Koufax, the successful Jewish baseball player. Perhaps the greatest pitcher of all time, as well as "the best Jewish hurler in history" (Hunting Tigers, p. 60), Koufax holds many major-league records. The highest paid player in the history of the game, Koufax is careful to maintain his All-American image. In his own autobiography, Koufax, he admits that "although he is supposed to read Aldous Huxley and Thomas Wolfe, and listen to Beethoven, Bach, and Mendelssohn, if anybody dropped in at his place they would more likely find him listening to a show tune or a Sinatra album" (Hunting Tigers, p. 61). His fondest memory, it appears, is of the maroon Rollfast bicycle his grandparents gave him for his tenth birthday. But Koufax himself was not a success until two other members of his team--"Allen Roth, the resident statistician, and Norm Sherry, a catcher" (Hunting Tigers, p. 63)--became interested in his progress. And these men, it seems, were also Jewish. Among the amusing letters Richler received debating this point was one from Jerome Holtzman, of the Chicago Sun-Times, who argued that "Sherry, a catcher, advised Koufax not to throw hard, advice I'm sure Sherry has given to dozens and dozens of Gentile pitchers, and advice which previously had been given to Koufax by Gentile coaches" (Hunting Tigers, p. 66). The essay ends with Richler darkly hinting at the possibility that "Bob Feller, Red Riffing and others threw bigoted anti-Semitic curve balls at Hank Greenberg whilst a later generation of American League pitchers fed Roger Maris pro-Gentile pitches" (Hunting Tigers, p. 69). The man who assumes the role of Jewish Avenger believes that prejudice is everywhere.

In "Bond," the Jewish Avenger discovers that the villains in the works of John Buchan and Ian Fleming are actually Jews. Richler quotes from Buchan's The Thirty-Nine Steps: "If you get to the real boss, then the one you are brought up against is a little white-faced Jew in a bath-chair with an eye like a rattlesnake" (Shovelling Trouble, pp. 61-62). Indeed, the Jew becomes a figure who is consciously plotting to destroy England through an international conspiracy. Sir Henry Channon and Sir Harold Nicolson both disliked Jews. But the most blatant example of anti-Semitic propaganda, Richler writes, is the career of James Bond. As he tries to point out, virtually all the villains in Ian Fleming's novels are obviously or by inference Jewish.

In Casino Royale, the first Bond novel, the villainous Le Chiffre is described by the Head of Station S of the British Secret Service as having Jewish blood, signified by "small ears with large lobes" (Shovelling Trouble, p. 63). In Moonraker, Sir Hugo Drax is not a Jew, but he is "cunningly endowed with all the characteristics the anti-Semite traditionally ascribes to the Jewish millionaire," for he is a bullying, dirty, ostentatious vulgarian who has no background and made his money on the metal market. He plays cards with his Jewish companion, Meyer, and indeed often cheats at bridge (Shovelling Trouble, p. 64). The arch-villain of Goldfinger is described as "a Britisher. Domiciled in Nassau. You'd think he'd be a Jew from the name, but he doesn't look it. . . . What had he been born? Not a Jew--though there might be Jewish blood in him" (Shovelling Trouble, p. 65). Another of Bond's creations, the demonic Ernst Stavro Blofeld, in On Her Majesty's Secret Service, has the small ears with large lobes that Richler thinks Fleming associates with Jewish blood:

> "Ah," said Bond, running over in his mind the Identicast picture of Blofeld and the complete printed physiognometry of the man in Records. "So he shouldn't by rights have lobes to his ears. Or at any rate it would be a strong piece of evidence for his case if he hadn't!"
> "That's right."
> "Well, he has got ear lobes," said Bond annoyed. "Rather pronounced lobes as a matter of fact. Where does that get us?"
> (Shovelling Trouble, p. 66)

As Richler points out, the secret international organizations these villains represent, SMERSH and SPECTRE, are perpetually plotting "the political or financial ruin or even the physical destruction of the freedom-loving west" (Shovelling Trouble, p. 67). This is also a common theme in Buchan's works. In The Thirty-Nine Steps, the hero Richard Hannay is told that "behind all the government and armies there was a big subterranean movement going on, engineered by a very dangerous people" (Shovelling Trouble, pp. 67-68). These anarchists are aided by financiers who are trying to make money. Richler believes that the prototype for such international conspiracies is the "notorious anti-Semitic forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which first appeared in Western Europe in 1920 and had, by 1930, been circulated throughout the world in millions of copies" (Shovelling Trouble, p. 68). These Protocols were used to incite massacres of Jews in Russia and later in Nazi Germany; they explain a system of achieving world domination:

> The twenty-four protocols purport to be made up of lectures delivered to the Jewish secret government, the Elders of Zion, on how to achieve world domination. Tangled and contradictory, the main idea is that the Jew, spreading confusion and terror, will eventually take over the globe. Like SPECTRE, they will use liberalism as a front. Like Mr. Big, they will foster discontent and unrest. The common people will be directed to overthrow their rulers and then a despot will be put in power. As there are more evil than good men in the world, force--the Elders have concluded--is the only sure means of government. (Shovelling Trouble, p. 69)

If the novels of Buchan and Fleming are indeed based on an appeal to anti-Semitism, the problems of the member of a minority group in a supposedly civilized society are serious. As Richler points out, "it was Fleming's most brilliant stroke to present himself not as an old-fashioned, frothing wog-hater, but as an ostensibly civilized voice which offered sanitized racism instead" (Shovelling Trouble, p. 81). Richler's sons are "crazy about James Bond movies," yet are "unaware that they have been cast as the villains of the dramas" (Shovelling Trouble, p. 83). He himself was brought up to revere John Buchan, the Governor-General of Canada, and did so until he discovered that Buchan's novels were anti-Semitic. Here Richler's allegiance to his Jewish background and to minority groups makes him temporarily forsake the mask of the satirist. The real anti-Semites, he implies, are those who believe they are liberals but who read subtle, anti-Semitic propaganda like the Bond novels and identify strongly with it. The minority man himself, both anti-hero and victim, "grows up with a double-image of himself, his own and society's" (Shovelling Trouble, p.83).

THE NOBLE SAVAGE IS SUBVERTED BY THE NEW TECHNOLOGY

Richler has always used examples of modern technology in his journalism and novels. He describes newspaper items, telephone conversations, television talk shows, interviews, mass magazines, and personalities from show business; and these technologies often provide appropriate forms for his work. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz became a successful film largely because the novel itself was written using a filmic technique. Cocksure is an exploration of how the commercial media affect the perceptions of individual man. Until the publication of St. Urbain's Horseman, however, Richler remains highly skeptical of the new freedom possible through electronic technology. Indeed, his hostility to mechanical technology extends even to those novels in which he describes the new electronic environment of the sixties. The Incomparable Atuk (1963) and Cocksure (1968) are alike in satirizing the threats to civilized man provided by the new sensibility. Man confronts the modern technological universe, and finds that he can neither understand nor relate to it. In the first of these works, The Incomparable Atuk, Richler describes the entry into civilization of the archetypal noble savage, a young Eskimo poet named Atuk. As he participates in the life of urban society, Atuk is corrupted by new media and technologies; he becomes a victim of the new sensibility.

After being discovered by the RCMP, Atuk comes to Toronto, a utopia of supermarkets, drugstores, department stores, and television studios. There he is interviewed on television and talks to members of the press, for apparently he is an important poet. But almost immediately he is commercialized. Feeling depressed in the city, he plays the inane games broadcast by radio stations, but finds that he lacks confidence and never wins. But he is determined, and as he puts it, "what you dare to dream; dare to do."[57] His fortunes are suddenly reversed when he sees some Eskimo sculptures in a shop window, and realizes his own earning potential. From then on Atuk becomes more and more a willing part of Toronto civilization: he goes on television, reads his poetry in coffee-shops, and promotes toys bearing his name. He hires a secretary to answer his fan mail, tells his Eskimo relatives that they are living in the past, and finally even tries to become a Jew because the Toronto literati seems to be composed mainly of Jews. Finally, however, it is revealed that prior to his literary success Atuk ate an American, Colonel Swiggert; and an ignoble businessman, Buck Twentyman, decides that using Atuk as a martyr would be an excellent way to publicize interest in commercial Eskimo products. Hence Atuk is arrested and is ultimately beheaded. The noble savage, it seems, is unable to survive.

Richler makes various satirical comments about Canadian national pride andloyalty to various institutions. He is especially caustic in his attitude to the RCMP, the original discoverers of Atuk, and shows us the young, idealistic Sgt. Jock Wilson, who disguises himself as a woman in order to seek out subversives in bars, clubs, coffee rooms, jazz cellars, and parks. Jock is so successful in his disguise that he wins the Miss Canada contest and ultimately decides to try for Miss Universe. But he falls in love with a student named Jim, apparently a communist agitator but actually a venal female columnist, Jean-Paul MacEwan, disguised as a man. And when Atuk himself is finally arrested, the people of Canada develop a nationalistic fervour in their attempts to protect Atuk, the misunderstood poet from a minority group. As we are told by a radio announcer, "Johnny Canuck . . . has been roused from his slumber. The accents differ, but the voice is the same" (Atuk, p. 182). Some people say that since Atuk comes from another culture, he should not be judged by civilization's standards. Others say he is a poet and is different from other men. The fact that Colonel Swiggert was an American is apparently an important factor in the development of this new nationalism. Indeed, a University of Toronto psychologist claims that "Atuk's act was one of the symbolic revenge. Culturally, economically, the Americans are eating our whole culture alive" (Atuk, p. 182).

Atuk himself, however, willingly destroys his own allegiance to Eskimo civilization and adopts the models of the city. "For an Eskimo boy to make his mark in this world, Atuk, he must be brighter, better, and faster than other boys" (Atuk, p. 65), the Old One of his tribe tells Atuk, but presumably this competition should occur within the Eskimo culture itself. As the Old One puts it, "an Eskimo should know his place" (Atuk, p. 49). But Atuk prefers to compete outside his tribe, and tells the Old One "you've never overcome your igloo mentality" (Atuk, p. 95). When Atuk's Eskimo relatives come to Toronto, their indigenous culture disintegrates. They decide to mass-produce their Eskimo sculpture and to adopt all aspects of Toronto's urban culture; their main interest becomes the profit they can make. Their prayers are now directed towards what movies will appear on television, and their tribal songs imitate commercials. Although they do not really know how to behave in the city, Atuk's example shows that it will be profitable for them to learn.

Richler also satirizes various types of Canadians and their attitudes to culture. Rory Peel, the Jewish director of the Twentyman Playhouse series, lives in a ranch-style house on a ravine, has a wife and three children, and keeps a German maid to prove he is not racially prejudiced. But he is primarily interested in Atuk as a commercial venture, and insists on buying shares in "Esky Enterprises." Disgusted by Atuk's poetry, Rory feels immensely superior to the young poet and makes sure that Atuk's past and sex life contain no secrets. "After all, he's only a dumb Eskimo. Almost a coloured man" (Atuk, p. 51), says Rory, but he is insulted when Atuk wants to marry into his own Jewish family. Atuk is tolerated as long as he remains purely a commercial proposition. The businessman whose company is promoting Atuk, the mysterious Buck Twentyman, is a mythic figure of legendary wealth and influence. He may be reactionary, we are told, but he is "first and foremost a Canadian" (Atuk, p. 61). Accordingly, Twentyman conforms with the 40% Canadian content regulation for his television station by running National Film Board documentaries from five to eight in the morning, and by showing Perry Mason, which of course contains Canadian-born actor Raymond Burr. Like the Star-Maker in Cocksure, Twentyman is a satirical figure who is half monster, half caricature; the fact that he willingly abandons whatever principles he may have for financial rewards is a sharp comment on how the arts are encouraged in Canada.

Other characters ridicule our national obsession for choosing particular Canadian heroes. Panofsky, the stereotyped Jewish sociologist, has been "collecting data for years for a paper on heredity and environment in Protestant society" (Atuk, p. 17). But he finally concludes that Jews and Protestants are in fact very different; the Protestants are not to blame for this, he explains, for their inferiority is inherited: they have always eaten the wrong food, worshipped the wrong heroes, and hence have always found life too complex. Panofsky is the reverse of the Protestant sociologist who firmly says that there is no racial difference between Protestants and Jews. Another character, the physical culture addict Dr. Parks, ridicules our Canadian tendency to improve ourselves, both physically and mentally, until we approach an American model. "You too," says Dr. Parks, "can develop a physique like Buddy Lane and overcome constipation, hernia, hardening of the arteries, diarrhoea, impotence, heart disease, and so forth" (Atuk, p. 36).

His own grotesque protégés include the "world's best developed blind negro" (*Atuk*, p. 37) and the incomparable Bette Dolan, the all-Canadian girl swimmer who eventually becomes Atuk's mistress. "She has a heart, Jean-Paul McEwan observed in her column, bigger than Alberta" (*Atuk*, p. 27). The lovely, radiant Bette is a constant encouragement to Atuk, although she can never be only *his* mistress. "I hope you realize," she explains to Atuk, "that . . . I belong to the nation. Like Jasper Park or Niagara Falls" (*Atuk*, p. 31).

The literary satire of *The Incomparable Atuk* is found mainly in various caricatures of figures connected with the arts. We have already mentioned Jean-Paul MacEwan and her affair with Sgt. Jock Wilson of the RCMP, but it appears she is also the "most astute journalist in Canada" (*Atuk*, p. 11), a moral watchdog and nationally known television personality who reacts violently to any hint of social injustice. After taking a man's name to survive in a man's world, she has written of prisons, political scandals, and indeed of any squalor she can find; she takes her tape-recorder everywhere, and her column "Sick, Sick, Sick" is slanted social criticism at its most sensational. She hates Atuk, but decides to support him in order to demonstrate Toronto's lack of cultural standards. Other Canadian critics are equally absurd. Seymour Bone, the fat, unhappy drama critic whose left-wing periodical *The Genius* is the key to his success, walks out of every second play he attends in Canada in order to seem controversial. He too is a nationally known television personality. However, Richler's strongest criticism is reserved for the two poles of Canadian criticism--the "academic" and the "anti-academic" approaches. The "academic" approach is represented by Professor Norman Gore, the champion of all minority groups, a man who is concerned with the effect Toronto is having on Atuk's artistic sensibility. A concerned liberal, Professor Gore welcomes criticism of his academic colleagues, for he thinks of himself as a friend of all persecuted artists and not as an academic critic. As he tells Atuk in private, to commercial interests "you are not a noble savage, a thing of beauty, but something else to exploit and murder" (Atuk, p. 93). His own annual intellectual dinner, Dinner with the Tastemakers, is in fact a nationally televised discussion of subjects like "How to Withstand Commercialism in our Society," and represents intellectual discussion at its most pretentious and banal.

But the most ridiculous character in the book is probably the "anti-academic" Harry Snipes, the angry, middle-aged editor of Metro, the Magazine for Cool Canucks. As a Canadian nationalist and editor, he says he stands "for the Canadian national identity and the American mags are trying to drive us out of business" (Atuk, p. 15). His own belief is that Canadians, who are too "conventional," live in "a mealy-mouthed atmosphere of mumble-mumble in national purpose" (Atuk, p.62). He tells Atuk that his poetry should be "more gutsy" (Atuk, p. 15), and suggests that he re-write a short story from Collier's to give him a start as a beginning writer. Opposed to all academics and their insipid approach to criticism, Harry thinks of himself as Canada's original angry young man. His favourite project is the resuscitation of a small town in northern Manitoba called Athens; he proposes an Athens "arts festival," opening with a production of Oedipus Rex in western dress. The new sensibility suggests that a new art form can be created by setting one environment inside another, but Richler is critical of such experiments. Although in The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure he is dealing almost exclusively with the technologies of the electronic age, he continues to be suspicious of their effects on man's moral nature.

COCKSURE EXPLORES RICHLER'S VIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MAN IN A THREATENING TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSE

Richler told Donald Cameron that "the ideological origins of Cocksure [1968] were to invert, in a sense, the fumbling hero of contemporary fiction, and to see how far one could make a case for that easily or glibly dismissed, middle-class, bill-paying, honourable man."[58] In The Incomparable Atuk, Richler had placed the noble savage within the new technological environment; in Cocksure, he extends this conception and places an ordinary man, already corrupted, in a universe determined by the power of the new media. Once described by Richler as "a satire dealing with caricatures and extremes and not with people,"[59] Cocksure is a pessimistic comment on how man's personal freedom is destroyed and manipulated by the new sensibility. Surrounded by the images of commercial media, faced with a new morality he cannot understand, man finds he has lost control of his own existence. And as in *The Incomparable Atuk*, the new electronic technology is directly responsible. *Cocksure* marks Richler's final attempt to resist the new sensibility, for in *St. Urbain's Horseman* he accepts the new, non-authoritarian society of the sixties, and becomes a true comic artist of the new sensibility rather than a traditional satirist.

The protagonist of *Cocksure*, Mortimer Griffin, is an insecure, apologetic man who works as an editor for an English publishing firm, Oriole Press. Perpetually afraid of being thought boring or prudish, Mortimer is nevertheless exhausted by his attempts to keep up with changes in contemporary morality and is always conscious of how conventional he really is. When he talks to others he feels that he is only handsome in a stereotyped, "suburban" way;[60] when he watches professional sports he realizes that he is physically ugly. He is careful to arrange the books in his library so that they show his friends his ostensibly liberal, cosmopolitan reading. After trying to conduct various extramarital affairs, he finally meets a girl whose only interest is in an affair as it might appear on the screen, and eventually he leaves his wife and lives with her. In the course of the novel, Mortimer himself becomes a figure of fantasy, a cliché satirizing the common man and his problems.

Mortimer is, in fact, the typical white Anglo-Saxon

Protestant who is determined not to be prejudiced. To show others that he is not becomes his obsession. When he stands behind a coloured girl in a line-up, he cannot decide whether or not to retrieve a glove she has dropped since "she was, after all, colored, and he did not want her to think him condescending on the one hand, or sexually presumptuous on the other (Cocksure, p. 25). But when he tries to have an affair with the coloured librarian Rachel Coleman (actually the same girl), he finds that she expects him to be interested in her mainly because she is black. In fact, Mortimer really wants to sleep with ~~her~~ because in this way he can prove that he is impotent only with his wife, Joyce, and he also believes that Rachel can give him an informed opinion on the size of his penis, which he believes is too small. He leaves when it appears that Rachel herself is prejudiced, since she will not sleep with anyone who is Jewish.

Actually Mortimer has many worries about his sexuality. He suspects he may be a latent homosexual and is paranoid about being approached by another man. His sexual fantasies are rather odd, he thinks, and he believes it abnormal to make love to his wife while thinking of Gordie Howe scoring a brilliant goal, but as the novel puts it, "a more sensible inner voice assured him that it was a slight tendency, none more, a containable drive magnified in his mind, because he unconsciously appreciated how dull he was, a placid WASP with a regular job, and only craved depravity in the hope it would make him more interesting" (Cocksure, pp. 72-73). More serious are his feelings of sexual inferiority with regard to other races such as Jews and Negroes. Embarrassed when a friend in a pub reads an explicit passage from Harold Robbins' The Adventurers, Mortimer becomes convinced that his wife is sexually repressed and accumulates a large stock of contraceptives, which he is too embarrassed to throw away. This makes him a sexual acrobat in the eyes of his friends, but Mortimer remains sexually frustrated. Even his readings in Human Sexual Response do little to help. Obsessed with reading books about his own inadequate sexuality and surrounded by commercial products based on sexual messages, Mortimer feels more and more doubtful about his own capability.

Mortimer's feelings of racial inferiority extend to more than his sexuality. In the evening course he gives at a nearby college, he is haunted by Jacob Shalinsky, a Jew who is convinced that all Jews are superior and all WASPs are racially prejudiced. Shalinsky's journal, Jewish Thought, prints incomprehensible articles about prejudice against the Jews, and he accuses Mortimer of being anti-Semitic. After all, Shalinsky points out, Mortimer's favourite writers--Eliot, Grahame Greene, and Shakespeare--are anti-Semitic, and there is no reason to believe that Mortimer himself is not a racist. Then Shalinsky decides that Mortimer is probably an anti-Semitic Jew. Mortimer tries to refute this with various documents, but as Shalinsky puts it, "a Jew is an idea. Today you're my idea of a Jew" (Cocksure, p. 245). He proudly points out, showing Mortimer his collection of letters from Einstein, Harold Laski, and other great men, that "most of the world's great men are Jews" (Cocksure, p. 185). In his many brief appearances in the novel, Shalinsky functions as Mortimer's racial conscience, his obsession with not appearing bigoted. When Mortimer is a ruined man at the end of the book, it is to Shalinsky that he takes his memoirs, for he knows what it is like to be a Jew, a member of a persecuted minority group. He may never be as militant as his aggressive Jewish friend and fellow editor Hyman Rosen, who isolates and fights any person believed to be a "Jew-baiter," but he knows what the mentality of persecution can produce.

An important theme of Cocksure is the failure of modern liberalism to offer solutions to the sexual, racial, and social problems of those like Mortimer. Many of the characters in the book are satirical figures who ridicule various aspects of liberalism. Mortimer's unkempt friend Ziggy, who becomes Joyce's lover, has found it necessary to reject his upper class Oxford education, accent, and name of "Gerald Spencer" in order to become a "self-confessed Renaissance Man, poet, film-maker, actor, and painter" (Cocksure, p. 142). After being sent down from Oxford and writing a pornographic novel in Paris, Ziggy has become Mortimer's antithesis: an earthy Sancho Panza figure who makes Mortimer aware of his own conventionality:

> Ziggy himself was short, hirsute, barrel-chested. His hooky nose had been twice broken

> and he had a thick neck and waxy tangled hairs protruded from his jug ears. His fingernails were black, there were warts on his broad square hands, and you could tell, just looking at him, that in other people's houses he filled his pockets with cigarettes and peed without lifting the seat. Women found Ziggy Spicehandler exciting. Wherever he went, even at the most modish parties, they turned to look at him. Me, Mortimer thought, I can stand alone at a party for hours, nobody turns to look at me. (Cocksure, pp. 34-35)

Mortimer's wife Joyce is attracted to Ziggy, for he seems to be a direct, genuine man rather than the superficial recluse Mortimer has become. And because Ziggy is Jewish, Joyce's affair with him can be called "progressive." Healthy and good-looking in a "wind-blown Canadian way" (Cocksure, p. 23), Joyce works for Oxfam and the Anti-Apartheid League. She religiously watches Insult, the controversial BBC-2 panel show, and she is cynical about the war in Vietnam. Her attitudes are a condemnation of everything the middle-class liberal represents.

Consider her plans for her small son, Doug, who is raised by standards we can only call absurdly permissive. Joyce's own reading includes books like the pornographic Story of O; she decides to start Doug on bedtime stories like Hiroshima and The Destruction of the European Jews. She regards Mortimer's kissing Doug good-night as outdated, and is always ready to tell Doug about the real psychological reasons for his family's behaviour. At his "liberated" Beatrice Webb School, Doug's activities include classes "streamed" for sexual activity, a pornographic Christmas play, and open discussions about masturbation.

There Doug is taught by Miss Laura Ryerson, originally a provincial, sentimental teacher from a small town in Ontario, who suddenly discovers that if she rewards her students sexually she has no trouble with them. Miss Ryerson, whose picture of England was once based on her reading of Kipling, Jane Austen, and Shakespeare, soon discovers that the country has changed. Instead of gruff old gentlemen perpetually reading The Illustrated London News, there are now commercial entrepreneurs trying to sell movies, memoirs, and teaching methods based on total sexual permissiveness.

In Cocksure, we see that there are no alternatives to this new commercialism except a search for personal, private fulfilment. Even Mortimer's immediate superior, the humanistic socialist Lord Woodcock, is almost powerless. This "saintly old man" (Cocksure, p. 39), a hold-over from the thirties, has written a book about all the charitable acts done by Germans to Jews in the Nazi era; his creed is "we must love one another or die" (Cocksure, p. 39). After the war Lord Woodcock and his friends successfully planted crops in German fields fertilized by Jewish blood, "thereby bringing dividends to gourmets the world over, regardless of race, color, or creed" (Cocksure, p. 43). But Lord Woodcock has had to sell Oriole Press to the Star Maker, emblematic of the new commercial interests, and can no longer be of any use except to tell stories of his past. The Star Maker and his employees are present throughout the novel, and are the most powerful force behind the actions of the many satirical characters.

Like the Horseman of St. Urbain's Horseman and Twentyman of The Incomparable Atuk, the Star Maker is a satirical figure who is half monster, half man. We are introduced to him through his dynamic lieutenant Dino Tomasso, the grotesque, half-blind emissary he sends to London when he buys Oriole Press. The Star Maker himself assumes control of the Oriole Press and hence of Mortimer. A mysterious tycoon who controls a vast business empire of film studios, television studios, gambling establishments and other interests, the Star Maker remains in seclusion and maintains his empire by remote control. The epitome of modern capitalism, he believes that Senator McCarthy cleaned "the liberal hacks out of Hollywood" (Cocksure, p. 49), and that the "revolution eats its own. Capitalism recreates itself" (Cocksure, p. 160). His omnipotence in the novel is unquestioned. The fact that he is an invalid, and that an emergency medical unit must follow him wherever he goes, makes essentially no difference. Neither does the fact that he is bisexual, that his heroes include the transsexual Chevalier d'Eon, an eighteenth-century nobleman whose success apparently depended on his skill as a "drag-artist" (Cocksure, p. 49). At the end of the novel, we discover that the Star Maker has become a "modern medical miracle" (Cocksure, p. 233). Because he wishes to have an heir, he has been surgically endowed with both male and female sexual organs, has copulated with himself, and has become pregnant. As he tells Mortimer, "since God, the first self-contained creator, Mortimer, I am now able to reproduce myself" (Cocksure, p. 236).

The Star Maker is a figure of both creation and destruction. As he tells Mortimer, he and his scientists have been creating Hollywood stars for years. The masculine, virtuous, movie stars who have always given Mortimer an inferiority complex are, in fact, rubber creations which are deflated between movies and stored in wooden boxes. These stars, referred to by the Star Maker as Goy Boys I and II, finally led to the development of Goy Boy III, or the Mini-Goy, a model created especially for television. And Mortimer learns, therefore, that the movie stars who have always given him an inferiority complex have actually never existed. They are only rubber models given to people like himself by the Star Maker, who finally tells Mortimer that he, the Star Maker, is a Jew. The situation has been inverted: it is a Jew who is providing commercial entertainment and who is making Gentiles believe that they can never approach the ideal image of a movie star.

Mortimer is unable to escape from the influence of the Star Maker. His love affair with the sex symbol Polly Morgan is itself an extension of the ideal world presented in the Star Maker's films. Indeed, Polly's life is actually lived as a film. Her apartment is lined with photographs of books, her mock fireplace is filled with plastic logs, and she herself speaks in the clichés of the Hollywood film. When she and Mortimer dine together, she is "bound to cut from pondering the sauce to serving coffee and sandwiches" (Cocksure, p. 230). Their affair is never consummated, because after Polly has welcomed Mortimer's preliminary advances with Hollywood clichés, she "cuts" to a scene of herself on the bed, satiated, an empty bottle of wine and two glasses on a nearby table. Every meeting becomes a cliché:

> One sun-filled but rather wintry afternoon, she insisted that he take her to Richmond Park, where they ate a picnic lunch.
>
> "You look absolutely ravishing," he said.
>
> "When we are old," she said, "I want you to always remember me like this, the sun catching fires in my hair . . . "
>
> "The look in your eyes," he continued for her, "ten fathoms deep."
>
> Reaching for her hand, he pulled her to him. Then, for he was in a considerate mood, just as he reached for the top button of her dress, he spun her round, so that she could cut away, so to speak . . . over his shoulder . . . to the stags locking horns in the distance. (Cocksure, p. 230)

Their relationship is ideal for Mortimer. Both he and Polly can live in their world of fantasy as long as they wish; Polly tells her acquaintances that he is a great lover, and of course never asks him to prove that he is. But the difficulty, as Mortimer sees it, is that the movies are becoming more explicit all the time, and there will come a day when Polly can identify with sexual intercourse shown on the screen. And as he sadly realizes, "then she would come to realize he wasn't up to the big scene, and she would look elsewhere for a man, a real man, to track in on her" (Cocksure, pp. 230-231). But until that time he prefers to remain secure in a world of fantasy, as do many others in our time.

IN HIS LAST NOVEL, ST. URBAIN'S HORSEMAN, RICHLER ACCEPTS THE NEW SENSIBILITY AND WORKS WITHIN IT

Cocksure and The Incomparable Atuk show Richler's resistance to the technological environment of the sixties. These works are destructive satires on man's problems in a rapidly changing universe. Richler once told Donald Cameron that "I don't think that much has changed, you know. I don't believe in Consciousness I, or Consciousness II, or Consciousness III. That belongs to Vogue magazine, like McLuhan."[61] He may have been exaggerating, but the remark is a summation of the philosophy informing his two satires. Attempting to relate to the new technology, he sees its destructive force instead of its ability to confer a new freedom. The monolithic forces of mechanical technology prevent him from realizing fully the new potential for human consciousness of the new sensibility. Yet as Richler turns from satire towards the new, more complex form of St. Urbain's Horseman (1971), he moves into the involved world of the new sensibility. While Cocksure presents characters destroyed by the new media, St. Urbain's Horseman presents men and women whose moral dilemmas are a direct result of the new electronic technology. Richler's interest in the new morality becomes exploration rather than criticism; he wants to see how man relates to his new freedom. As he told Donald Cameron, St. Urbain's Horseman is a new "novel of character" rather than a satire,[62] and the book is a humane, comic exploration of man's moral problems in a technological world.

The central figure in the novel is Jake Hersh, a Canadian film-maker living in London who is victimized by his friend Harry Stein and is eventually tried for indecently assaulting a young German au pair girl. As George Woodcock puts it, Jake is an "Orwellian decent man in a world without decency," and like the protagonists of Richler's previous works Jake is an exile from Canada.[63] Since he views Canada as a colonial desert with little interest in the arts, he has had to leave for London, where he and other expatriates "reared to believe in the cultural thinness of their own blood"[64] play baseball, try to write film-scripts, and talk about Canada's deficiencies in the arts. Jake originally blames Canada for his frustrations as a film-maker; as he understands it, Canada is known for its large uranium deposits and as the birth-place of Walter Pidgeon (Horseman, p. 119). Only mediocre playwrights like Doug Fraser, "one of Canada's most uncompromising and prolific problem playwrights," remain in Canada:

> In one of his plays, for instance, a self-made businessman sets himself single-mindedly to making . . . THE FIRST MILLION. He has only just acquired it, consummating the biggest deal of his life, and is now preparing to get to know his family, as it were when the doctor tells him it isn't an ulcer--its stomach cancer!!! Which made for a somewhat downbeat ending. This didn't put off Canada's highbrow CBC, but it was clearly not the sort of stuff American TV networks would tackle, especially, as Doug said, in the Aspirin Age. Jenny and Doug had no children. Their way, they said, of facing up to the Fact of the Bomb. Doug maintained an office with filing cabinets labeled IDEAS, CHARACTERS, and CONTRACTS.
> (Horseman, pp. 148-149)

In many ways, Jake uses the fact of his Canadian origins as security against the possibility of failure. In continually referring to the artistic sterility of the Canadian scene, he implies that any artistic success in London is an improvement on what he could do in Canada. When his friend Duddy Kravitz visits him and reveals that he is working for the CBC and is compiling a Canadian Jewish Who's Who, Jake is reminded of what he would have done had he stayed in Canada. But even in London Jake is discontented; for he is a man of imagination, and the realities of his environment in London are just as depressing as those he might find on St. Urbain Street in Montreal. With the advent of a new morality in artistic and sexual matters, Jake somehow believes that his own success as a film-maker and married man is out of place. As Duddy tells him, "all this new outspokenness in the arts is taking the kicks out of it for me. Gone are the guilty pleasures, the dirty secret joys" (Horseman, p. 459). Jake loves his wife, Nancy, and wishes to remain faithful to her, but he knows that in his group of expatriates "to love your wife" means being denied "a reprobate's license" (Horseman, p. 298). He is a complex character caught in a world of changing values, and his problems and obsessions mirror our own. Although he calls himself a liberal he does not believe the slogans of left-wing propagandists; he engages in a wide range of sexual fantasies but still remains faithful to his wife; and seems caught between the knowledge that he is a success and that his trial may finish his career. Indeed, we are told that "Jake felt his generation was being crushed by two hysterical forces, the outraged work-oriented old and the spitefully playful young, each heaving half truths at one another" (Horseman, p. 309).

In the manner of film itself, we are given many flashbacks of Jake's early life in Montreal, with its poverty, family ties, and mock-heroic successes. We know that Jake identifies with his mysterious cousin Joey, the mythic Jewish Horseman who travels from land to land searching for Nazi war criminals, and we find that Jake has often been confused with Joey. When he tries to find freedom in New York, young Jake is stopped by customs officials, who reveal in their questions something of the Horseman's mythic capabilities. Jake himself identifies strongly with society's victims even though he is a success: "From the beginning, he had expected the outer, brutalized world to intrude on their little one, inflated with love but ultimately self-serving and cocooned by money. The times were depraved" (Horseman, pp. 88-89). In his quest for the Horseman, Jake is also searching for a philosophy that will help him to understand the changing values of his time, an age which follows closely the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps. When he takes a trip to Israel to visit his homeland, he is smugly told that "we're a new kind of Jew here. We have restored Jewish pride" (Horseman, p. 252). However, this does not satisfy Jake, who is looking for more than national pride. He himself feels guilty about man's inhumanity to man, and his quest for the Horseman is a manifestation of this. And when the Horseman is mentioned, it is often in connection with the Horseman's quarry, the inhuman Nazi Dr. Mengele:

> Dr. Mengele was concerned about the women's block.
>
> '. . . The women often lapped up their food like dogs; the only source of water was right next to the latrine, and this thin stream also served to wash away the excrement. There the women stood and drank or tried to take a little water with them in some container while next to them their fellow sufferers sat on the latrines. And throughout it all the female guards hit them with clubs. And while this was going on the S.S. walked up and down and watched.'
>
> Bodies were gnawed by rats, as were unconscious women. The women were plagued by lice.
>
> 'Then Mengele came. He was the first one to rid the entire women's camp of lice. He simply had the entire block gassed. Then he disinfected the block.' (Horseman, pp. 175-176)

In delineating Jake's search for the Horseman, the novel includes the devices of the burlesque that Richler uses in his other works. There are many fragments of film scripts, newspaper items, letters, and episodes mocking social, sexual, and marital customs.[65] This is a burlesque of modern life in many of its aspects, and as in most burlesques the comic elements take several recognizable forms.[66] The episodic aspects of the novel provide comedy; we learn for instance of Jake's meeting with his lawyer Ormsby-Fletcher, Duddy's sexual experiences, and Herky's bizarre invention of a "toilet with a mind" which is, we are told, "the biggest breakthrough since Thomas Crapper's Niagara" (Horseman, p. 393). A ridiculous baseball game between Jake's expatriate friends is described in considerable detail. But the most obvious device in the novel, and one which Richler also uses in Cocksure, is the use of what Warren Tallman calls "bathroom humour" to mock the false sophistication of Jake's society.[67] To ridicule the stupidity and tawdriness of those who surround him, Jake dwells inordinately on fantasies of sex and persecution. One room of his house is devoted to war relics from Nazi Germany; he continually crosses the division between fantasy and reality, and sees reality in terms of his own fantastic imagination. Several characters in the novel are comic, yet they suggest the decay of certain moral values in society. Duddy, still adolescent in his view of sex, is growing old. Mrs. Hersh, once a power in the Jewish family, has little influence in Jake's household. Only in Jake's wife Nancy do we see the humanistic devotion which Jake is searching for, and in their final reconciliation the opposites in the novel--Jew and Gentile, fantastic and realistic, idealism and bondage--do in a way coalesce against the influence of the outside world.[68] The real world may be absurd, but their affection is genuine.

George Woodcock perceptively compares Richler's technique to that of Wyndham Lewis in The Apes of God and Swift in Gulliver's Travels.[69] In St. Urbain's Horseman and in his earlier works, Richler uses a technique of satirical fantasy to create hollow, fictional monsters which mock the incongruity of modern life, and these monsters--Twentyman in The Incomparable Atuk; the Star Maker in Cocksure; and the Horseman--are Swift's yahoos or Lewis' apes transposed into our time.[70] Harry Stein, the Iago figure who represents the dark side of Jake's ego, is such a figure. A habitual criminal whose hobbies include taking pornographic pictures, enjoying various sexual perversions, and frequenting certain pornographic bookshops in Soho, Harry is an obscene representative of the urban underworld. He lives in a filthy, tiny apartment; he is described as almost sub-human:

> Sneering, ferret-like Hershel. A Londoner born, a Londoner bred. National Health had been enacted in time for the steel-rimmed glasses, but too late to mend the crooked tartar-encrusted teeth. Harry's brown hair was thin and dry, his skin splotchy and almost as gray as his mac, and there were little tufts of hair spurting out of his ears. From the dampness, probably, Jake had thought at the time, like the shoots that grow in potatoes if they are abandoned under the sink.
> (Horseman, p. 63)

As Harry says, "I'm not getting enough of anything don't you see? And most of the things I want I'm already too old to enjoy" (Horseman, p. 375). Although his hold over Jake is based primarily on his knowledge of Jake's tax problems, the side of urban life he represents obviously fascinates Jake, who associates with Harry even though their worlds are far apart. For unlike Jake with his interest in creativity and imagination, Harry is a vicious, destructive character and his response to life contradicts everything Jake believes in. When Harry is sentenced in court, the Crown prosecutor describes him vividly: "He is flotsam. The driftwood that floats in the brackish waters of the I'm-all-right-Jack society. Stroll through the streets of Soho, the back alleys of this once proud city, and within the shadow of Nelson's column you will uncover a plethora of Steins, lingering outside pornography shops and strip-club displays" (Horseman, p. 445).

Opposed to the destructive forces symbolized by Harry is Jake's quest for the Horseman, a satirical figure which Richler described to Donald Cameron as "meant to be allusive and complex . . . ambivalent, full of ambiguities."[71] In the context of the novel, the Horseman becomes a mythic figure. Born on St. Urbain Street, the Horseman travels to various countries on a strange quest; he tells no one about his activities, but is apparently wanted by the police. When he returns suddenly to St. Urbain Street with a new MG sports car and new clothes, we are told he could have been "a knight returned from a foreign crusade" (Horseman, p. 129). Then he disappears again, reappearing mysteriously in Israel; in Jake's dreams he becomes a symbol of retaliation against oppression. In the quest for Jake's own philosophy, the Horseman becomes a neo-romantic figure opposed to the dehumanized values of the modern world:

> Out there, he had thought, resuming his place in the dock. Out there, riding even now. St. Urbain's Horseman. Deprived of his Barnaby "International," without his bespoke riding habit from Jos. Monaghan Ltd. of St. Stephen's Green Dublin. Galloping, thundering. Over the olive-green hills of the Upper Galilee. Or possibly already in Paraguay. Out on the steaming flood plains of the Parana, neck-reining his magnificent Plevan stallion with his bridle hand as he reaches into his goatskin saddlebag for his field glasses, searching the savannas below for the unmarked track that winds into the jungle, between Puerto San Vincente and the border fortress of Carlos Antonio Lopez, where the Doktor waits, unaware.
>
> (Horseman, p. 70)

The figure of the Horseman emphasizes Richler's final acceptance of the new sensibility. At the end of St. Urbain's Horseman, Jake says "I will be St. Urbain's avenging Horseman" (Horseman, p. 464), and writes "presumed dead" over the entry in the Horseman's journal describing Joey's death. There is hope for the man of the new sensibility, and this hope largely resides in man's new ability to use electronic media and the new morality against the dehumanized forces of mechanical technology. Jake's experiences show that man can live with his new freedom, that man's new sense of commitment enables him to resist the horrors of the mechanical age. Man moves beyond the conventional clichés of alienation in the mechanical age, and into a new, involved awareness of human consciousness. Although this in-depth involvement creates certain moral difficulties, man survives by adapting to the new sensibility instead of resisting it. St. Urbain's Horseman is an important step in Richler's definition of the new sensibility. From the stereotyped alienation of his early novels, he progressed in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, The Incomparable Atuk, Cocksure, and his journalism to an interest in the new sensibility, and yet he still seemed to be resisting the freedom of the new technology. In St. Urbain's Horseman, however, Richler accepts the environment of the new sensibility as his own, and stresses instead how man relates to this bewildering universe. He now understands the multiplication of electronic technologies and their power, and as a result St. Urbain's Horseman is a complex, successful parable of the electronic age.

CHAPTER III

MARGARET ATWOOD: ACCEPTING THE NEW TECHNOLOGY

Among the young Canadian writers who first gained public recognition during the late sixties, Margaret Atwood has had perhaps the widest influence. Though she published a book of poems, Double Persephone, as early as 1961, her reputation really began with the publication of her second poetry collection, The Circle Game (1966), a book which won the Governor-General's Award. Since that time, she has published another five volumes of poetry, two novels, and an influential critical study, Survival, which offers a synoptic view of Canadian literature. All her books since The Circle Game are still in print, and several have been published in Britain and the United States. Many have become texts in courses on contemporary Canadian literature in the universities. Atwood's name has become synonymous with new developments in Canadian fiction; her editorial direction at Anansi Press has helped to bring us some of the most experimental work produced in Canada. Yet her central achievement still remains her poetry, which relates man to the treacherous technological environment surrounding him. The prose is auxilliary to her poetry; The Edible Woman, Surfacing, and Survival are interesting explorations of the themes discussed in depth in Atwood's poems.

Atwood's works are unified, however, by the central theme of how man relates to his new freedom, his new sensibility.

The new electronic environment is forbidding, dangerous; lost in a technological nightmare, we resort to games and self-deception in order to survive. Atwood's second collection of poems, The Circle Game (1966), introduces themes which reappear in her later works. Her interest in Canada has made her a strongly nationalistic Canadian writer, and she emphasized in an interview with Graeme Gibson that a writer who leaves his own country becomes an "amputee" out of touch with his native land:

> You are a kind of amputee and you have to either go away and write as an exile or you can go away and write as a fraud, but you can't stay there and write real books about a real place, because it somehow . . . there's no input for it, and there's no output for it.[1]

In my discussion of her latest novel, Surfacing, I shall examine this theme in more detail, but what appears most strongly to suggest it in her poetry is her strong sense of place, her use of images from the Canadian landscape. But this is an uncertain landscape where panic and frustration lie menacingly just beneath the surface; it is indeed what Peter Stevens calls a "stunted landscape."[2] Hope and communication are almost non-existent here, and we play games in order to protect ourselves from the eyes of others.[3] Most of all we have a sense of frustration, of captivity, and we realize that our games are symbolic of spiritual emptiness.

In "The Circle Game" as in other poems in this collection, we can identify closely with this feeling of frustration and captivity. When the poet watches children playing, she sees "the concentration/ on their faces, their eyes/ fixed on the empty/ moving spaces,"[4] for the circle game, like the dance around the "prickly pear" in Eliot's "The Hollow Men," is an empty ritual. There is no celebration or joy in the dance, but rather a frightening somnambulant quality abstracted from the natural landscape of the poem, "the grass/ underfoot ignored, the trees/ circling the lawn/ ignored, the lake ignored" (Circle Game, p. 35). The poet is frozen, transfixed, an outside observer existing only as a motionless specimen of humanity:

> and I am fixed, stuck
> down on the outspread map
> of this room, of your mind's continent
>   "here and yet not here, like
>   the wardrobe and the mirrors
>   the voices through the wall
>   your body ignored on the bed),
>
> transfixed
> by your eyes'
> cold blue thumbtacks . . .
>   (Circle Game, p. 40)

We are reminded of the spiritual enervation of Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock, who also suffered from similar feelings of vulnerability and paralysis. Both Prufrock and Atwood's narrator devise elaborate rituals, or games, in order to protect themselves from possible ridicule, and both erect defenses which crumble when the slightest suggestion of introspection is involved. The "calculated ploys/ of the body, the witticisms/ of touch" (Circle Game, p. 39) are distancing elements of the game, for they prevent self-involvement. In Atwood's poetry, this leads to a sense of panic, and the fixed, formal patterns of ritualized games clearly cannot prevent shifting patterns of subconscious meaning from developing. The narrator, a "spineless woman in/ a cage of bones" (Circle Game, p. 43), sees herself within society as a wooden stereotype, a totemic figure; in "Some Objects of Wood and Stone," these are the "wooden people:/ static, multiple/ uprooted and trans-/ planted" (Circle Game, p. 59). They exist in suburbs planned by those who, we are told in "The City Planners," are concerned only with "transitory lines rigid as wooden borders/ on a wall in the white vanishing air" (Circle Game, p. 28). Indeed, this formalized, sterile existence makes the narrator ask why we need "such/ elaborate defences" for "things that are no longer/ (much) worth defending" (Circle Game, p. 41).

In order to escape from such an existence, the poet suggests a return to primitive myth, a collective form of activity suggested to her by the sight of children playing the circle game. Nevertheless, she discovers that even when children are playing apparently harmless games they seem to repeat patterns of ancient warfare and brutality. They build trenches, sand-moats, and make weapons to defend themselves from other children; they are most interested in legends of "monstrous battles, and secret/ betrayals in the forest/ and brutal deaths" (Circle Game, p. 37). This is the frightening world of William Golding's Lord of the Flies, a world in which children become predators. Their destructiveness is shocking because it appears in a stereotyped childhood world of innocence:

> The next night
> walking along the beach
>
> we found the trenches
> they had been making:
> fortified with pointed sticks
> driven into the sides
> of their sand moats
>
> and a lake-enclosed island
> with no bridges . . .
> (Circle Game, p. 38)

In "Eventual Proteus," the poet tells us that "the early languages/ are obsolete" (Circle Game, p. 31), and in a manner reminiscent of Eliot, she describes the "vacant spaces/ of peeling rooms/ and rented minutes, climbing/ all the expected stairs" (Circle Game, p. 31). Yet if we attempt to escape from such a linear pattern by returning to mythical experience, we find that the patterns unconsciously repeated are the archetypal ones: the dying hero, the epic battle, and the journey to the underworld. Hence in their love of brutality the children only repeat what has gone before, and the faces of brutality described in "After the Flood, We" as "almost-human/ brutal faces forming/ (slowly)/ out of stone" (Circle Game, p. 12) suggest both the past and the future. In growing to maturity, however, the children discover that the circle game will become less a game than a way of life:

> especially
> they like guns
> and the armour brought from
> other times and countries

and when they go home
their drawing will be full
for some days, of swords
archaic sunburst maces
broken spears
and vivid red explosions.

While they explore the cannons
(they aren't our children) . . .
(Circle Game, p. 40)

There are several possible responses to the knowledge that archetypal patterns are uncertain and include elements of which man knows very little. One response discussed extensively in "The Circle Game" and in virtually all Atwood's work is the assumption of the victim role as a defense against self-knowledge. If we "live/ on all the edges there are" (Circle Game,p. 16), we are told in "Evening Trainstation Before Departure," we can protect ourselves by playing the "safe game/ the orphan game/ the ragged winter game/ that says, I am alone" (Circle Game, p. 41), and by doing this we can delude ourselves into thinking we are not involved in the meaningless social life of those who live by "cheerful fire-/ places and satin-/ ribboned suburban laughter" (Circle Game, p. 42). Indeed, the victim even tells himself that he is glad to be divorced from human experience, that in fact "he's glad/ to be left/ out by himself/ in the cold" (Circle Game, p. 42). And as the narrator of Surfacing discovers, playing the role of alienated victim can become an absorbing activity, for not only can we excite the pity of others, but we can also delude ourselves into believing that social customs are irrelevant. In its own way, however, playing the role of victim is yet another circle game, since it is self-perpetuating and does not lead to any greater self-realization.

Rather than playing the victim role, the poet chooses to investigate further the role of the subconscious in man's experience, and she describes in "A Descent through the Carpet" a realm of "dream creatures that glow/ sulphurous in darkness or/ flash like neurons" (Circle Game, p. 22)--the world of the creative imagination. This is a hidden world of subconscious potential where a journey

> is like a groping through a mirror
> whose glass has melted
> to the consistency
> of gelatine
>
> You refuse to be
> (and I)
> an exact reflection, yet
> will not walk from the glass,
> be separate.
> (Circle Game, p. 36)

As in the world of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," we see reflections of ourselves in the imaginative vision, yet these are visions of distortion in which the alter ego, as described in "A Sibyl," mirrors the victim's inhibitions and appears "with her safely bottled anguish and her glass/ despair" (Circle Game, p. 51). In entering the world of the imagination as an escape from the claustrophobia of the circle game, the poet is searching for "some key to these things/ which must be writings/ and are locked against us" (Circle Game, p. 76), as she puts it in "A Place: Fragments." She wishes to break the circle, to destroy the fragile nature of our defenses against ourselves:

I want to break
these bones, your prisoning rhythms
(winter,
summer)
all the glass cases,

erase all maps,
crack the protecting
eggshell of your turning
singing children:

I want the circle
broken.
(Circle Game, p. 44)

This is an image of transformation, of release through imaginative vision; the poet says in "Pre-Amphibian" that she wishes to be "released/ from the lucidities of day (Circle Game, p. 63). Release from the circle game through imaginative vision brings self-knowledge, and through subconscious exploration we learn to accept these mythic patterns and to recognize them in ourselves. And as we emerge from the subconscious journey we are reborn; as she describes it in "Pre-Amphibian," "we flounder, the air/ ungainly in our new lungs/ with sunlight steaming merciless on the shores of morning" (Circle Game, p. 64).

IN A TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSE, MAN BECOMES A VICTIM

In Atwood's next book of poetry, The Animals in That Country (1968), we are able to trace her continuing interest in the idea of man as victim, a theme we find discussed at length in The Edible Woman and Surfacing. The theme is, of course, common in Canadian fiction, for many recent novels--Robert Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man and Margaret Laurence's The Fire-Dwellers, among others--are concerned with the problems of the individual who feels he must survive under the constant threat of persecution, whether it be political, social, or psychological. In Ernest Thompson Seton's Biography of a Grizzly we see the same theme discussed, though Seton uses animals themselves as victims.[5] As Atwood told Graeme Gibson, we all tend to identify with such archetypal victim figures:

> If you define yourself as innocent then nothing is ever your fault--it is always somebody else doing it to you, and until you stop defining yourself as a victim that will always be true.[6] It will always be somebody else's fault. . . .

The state of victimization, therefore, is a state of mind which we can use to rationalize our failures. This appears in "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," where a man stands "on a sheet of green paper/ proclaiming himself the centre,/ with no walls, no borders/ anywhere," and shouts from his position of total freedom "let me out!"[7] His is spiritual rather than physical victimization, yet he remains a victim. The animals of these poems are seen in attitudes of terror and victimization, for they are the quarry, the hunted. "They have the faces of/ no-one" (Animals, p. 3), the poet tells us in "The Animals in That Country," and yet they have human faces, for they are meant to be human:

> In that country th[illegible]nimals
> have the faces o[illegible]ople:
>
> the ceremonial
> cats possessing the streets

the fox run
politely to earth, the huntsmen
standing around him, fixed
in their tapestry of manners

the bull, embroidered
with blood and given
an elegant death, trumpets, his name
stamped on him, heraldic brand . . .
(Animals, p. 2)

The poet makes a symbolic distinction between the animals of "that country," which have the "faces of people," and those of "this country," which have the "faces of/ animals" (Animals, p. 3). In one country we see the hunters, with their ritualistic methods of killing--the foxhunt and the bullfight; in the other country we see the quarry whose "eyes/ flash once in car headlights/ and are gone" (Animals, p. 3). In "that country" death has become a social ritual, but in "this country" victims are quickly forgotten. Yet in both countries there is the same atmosphere of panic, of claustrophobia. The aftermath of the chase shows us the victim destroyed; in "After I Fell Apart," the "brain was a/ broken doll, its heart creaked/ with wrong pendulums, its clock-/ work planets, glass eyes/ jangled" (Animals, p. 56).

The image of the victim pursued, caught, and finally destroyed is a common one in Atwood's poetry. Especially interesting is the way the victim appears in different situations, though the final result is usually the same. In "A Night in the Royal Ontario Museum," we see Atwood's narrator imprisoned in a labyrinth of fossils, rocks, minerals, and grotesque signs telling her "YOU ARE HERE"

(Animals, p. 20). Surrounded by images of "marble/ Greece and Rome, the bronze/ horses of China" (Animals, p. 20), she becomes aware of the hideous lifelessness of her surroundings; all is fixed, sterile beneath the glare of fluorescent lamps. She hears voices of the past, yet this is not a recreation of history but rather an attempt to re-define history for the use of twentieth century man:

> Who locked me
>
> into this crazed man-made
> stone brain
>   where the weathered
> totempole jabs a blunt
> finger at the byzantine
> mosaic dome
>
> Under that ornate
> golden cranium I wander
> among fragments of gods, tarnished
> coins, embalmed gestures
> chronologically arranged,
> looking for the EXIT sign . . .
>   (Animals, p. 20)

These "carved masks, wood and fur" (Animals, p. 20) indicate the appearance of historical periods in a linear way, yet they give no sense of historical myth. Such myth cannot be effectively conveyed by the exhibits in a museum, for in order to appreciate historical myth man must use his imagination. Instead of a sense of myth, the poet finds in the museum a spiritual desolation, a sense that she is seeing only the masks of history rather than the reality beneath.

One aspect revealed by man's assumption of the victim role is the intensity of the destructive forces opposing him. Images of destruction are common in Atwood's poetry, and they usually assume the metaphor of the hunter, the trapper; we are reminded of similar images in Michael Ondaatje's The Collected Works of Billy the Kid. And often the hunter is unaware of his own destructive tendencies. In Surfacing, for instance, the narrator's friends destroy both landscape and human values, but they appear not to realize that they play such a role. It is programmed into them, and the inference is that such a role becomes part of our way of life in modern society. In "The Trappers," we see men following

> . . . the abstract hunger
> to trap and smash
> the creature, to crush
> the red sun at the centre
>
> also the wish
> to mark the snow with feral
> knowledge, to enter the narrow
> resonant skull, to make each
> tree and season an owned
> territory . . .
> (Animals, p. 35)

According to the poet, those who kill are often ignorant of why they do so. In "The Green Giant Murder," detectives attempt to solve the unexplained murder of a mysterious "green giant," who functions as a victim archetype combining the mythical attributes of a giant with those of twentieth-century advertising. He is obviously dead, yet Atwood's Lilliputian detectives are unable to decide on the cause of death:

> Some say he did it
> himself: his riddled teeth
> are clues, his green
> skin is pocked with cryptic

symptoms, all
his limbs are implicated.

Others say he is blameless
and also praise him
for being what he is:

a vegetable
corpse of ice, essential
fact for the practice of their
art, these cool
dissections.
(Animals, p. 33)

In a similar poem, "The Green Man," we are told that such a mythic figure is an undefined "clear mirror/ because he had no features" (Animals, p. 12). Those who examine the victim perceive him only in relation to themselves, and they cannot understand why he is a victim. Using only analytical reason in a "land where geometries are multiple," such men leave their own conventional "red arrows" and "faint ritual/ markings" (Animals, p. 4), and as we discover in "The Surveyors," they can destroy a country's identity and leave only the "vestiges of an erased/ people" (Animals, p. 4). Hence the archetypal victim is identified both with the destruction of landscape and with that of the individual mind. In "Backdrop Addresses Cowboy," a garbage heap is used to represent this desolation:

I am also what surrounds you:
my brain
scattered with your
tincans, bones, empty shells,
the litter of your invasions.

I am the space you desecrate
as you pass through.
(Animals, p. 51).

This is ultimately a tragic universe, for without their natural habitat no animals in any country are able to survive. In their destruction, they represent Atwood's own concern with the victims of contemporary urban civilization.

ATWOOD RETRIEVES THE SUSANNA MOODIE FIGURE AND SETS HER WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE NEW SENSIBILITY

The new writers create art forms by retrieving old environments and setting them within newer ones. John Robert Colombo's "found poems" place nineteenth century Canadian history within the technological present. In the same way, Atwood retrieves the Susanna Moodie figure, and sets her in the multiple awareness of the new sensibility. She claims that the poems in The Journals of Susanna Moodie (1970) were written after she dreamt she was watching an opera about Susanna Moodie. After reading Mrs. Moodie's two books about Canada, Roughing it in the Bush and Life in the Clearings, she had noticed how many of Mrs. Moodie's obsessions reflected modern technological experience.[8] In her identification of Mrs. Moodie both with England and with Canada, the poet symbolically presents the perceptions of any colonial nation; and in the sixties the metaphor extends, of course, to Canada as counter-structure to the monolithic forces of American technology. This is a theme also explored at length in Surfacing, and it appears in such other novels of the new sensibility as Robert Kroetsch's Gone Indian and The Studhorse Man. As The Journals of

Susanna Moodie proceeds, the debate between gentility and Canadian perception gradually changes to a debate between technology and modern man. The "cultural schizophrenia" Atwood describes in her "Afterword" is essentially the result of Canada's surrender to the mechanized technologies of other nations:

> If the national mental illness of the United States is megalomania, that of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia. Mrs. Moodie is divided down the middle: she praises the Canadian landscape but accuses it of destroying her; she dislikes the people already in Canada but finds in people her only refuge from the land itself; she preaches progress and the march of civilization while brooding elegiacally upon the destruction of the wilderness; she delivers optimistic sermons while showing herself to be fascinated with deaths, murders, the criminals in Kingston Penitentiary and the incurably insane in the Toronto lunatic asylum. She claims to be an ardent Canadian patriot while all the time standing back from the country and criticizing it as though she were a detached observer, a stranger.
> (Susanna Moodie, p. 62)

In Journal I (1832-1840), we see Mrs. Moodie arriving in Canada, travelling up the St. Lawrence, establishing herself on a farm, and attempting to come to terms with her environment while still retaining her English past. As Atwood puts it, "she can neither hold on to her English past nor renounce it for a belief in her Canadian future" (Susanna Moodie, p. 63). The poem "First Neighbours" shows Mrs. Moodie's feelings of alienation as she attempts to adapt to Canadian ways:

> The people, I live among, unforgivingly,
> previous to me, grudging
> the way I breathe their
> property, the air,

> speaking a twisted dialect to my differently-
> shaped ears
>
> though I tried to adapt
>
> (the girl in a red tattered
> petticoat, who jeered at me for my burned bread
>
> Go back where you came from . . .
> (Susanna Moodie, p. 14)

In "Disembarking at Quebec," Mrs. Moodie sees herself as a "word/ in a foreign language" (Susanna Moodie, p. 11), and the hostility she encounters makes her initial adjustment to Canada rather difficult. And she knows that England is now "unreachable . . . sunk down into the sea" (Susanna Moodie, p. 14); she is alone with her "inept remarks,/ futile and spastic gestures" (Susanna Moodie, p. 14) which seem so misplaced in the Canadian environment. Her homesickness for England becomes transferred to her vision of Canada, which she still regards as a British outpost; indeed, in Roughing It in the Bush the real Mrs. Moodie explains that Canada, "the great fostering mother of the orphans of civilization," is the "offspring of Britain."[9]

Atwood's Moodie makes a determined effort to escape from the narrowing influence of her colonial perception, and in "First Neighbours" we see that she has decided to view the Canadian environment as "something to be endured/ but not surprised by " (Susanna Moodie, p. 15). The poem "Looking In a Mirror" examines Mrs. Moodie's knowledge of how her English conventions need to change if she is to understand life in Canada:

> My heirloom face I brought
> with me a crushed eggshell
> among other debris:
> the china plate shattered
> on the forest road, the shawl
> from India decayed, pieces of letters
>
> and the sun here had stained
> me its barbarous colour . . .
> (Susanna Moodie, p. 24)

As Journal I ends, Mrs. Moodie is beginning to accept her role as a Canadian, though she still asks herself if her attempt to establish a new identity means the loss of her English traditions. "You find only/ the shape you already are," she says in "Looking in a Mirror," "but what/ if you have forgotten that?" (Susanna Moodie, p. 25). Atwood explains the situation as one that applies to any Canadian:

> We are all immigrants to this place even if we were born here: the country is too big for anyone to inhabit completely, and in the parts unknown to us we move in fear, exiles and invaders. This country is something that must be chosen--it is so easy to leave--and if we do choose it we are still choosing a violent duality.
> (Susanna Moodie, p. 62)

Journal II (1840-1871) examines the dualities necessary for life in Canada in either Mrs. Moodie's day or our own. In "The Double Voice," a debate between gentility and reality which reminds us of Tennyson's more extended debate between art and reality, "The Two Voices," we see a poetic, artificial picture of Canada through Mrs. Moodie's "bleared and gradually/ bleaching eyes" (Susanna Moodie, p. 42). As in her idealized dream of "Dream 1: The Bush Garden," in which she dreams of "potatoes curled/ like pale grubs in the soil" (Susanna Moodie, p. 34), the voice of English gentility gives a pathetic picture of attempts to describe a rugged Canadian landscape in foreign European tones:

> Two voices
> took turns using my eyes:
>
> One had manners,
> painted in watercolours,
> used hushed tones when speaking
> of mountains or Niagara Falls,
> composed uplifting verse
> and expended sentiment upon the poor.
> (Susanna Moodie, p. 42)

This is the voice of Bliss Carman or, more recently, that of Robert Finch; in this voice we can trace the accents of a romantic, bucolic Canada, a replica of the pastoral paradise often described by English poets like Pope and Wordsworth. But such a picture is inappropriate in Canada; indeed, as Atwood explains, Mrs. Moodie can only survive by accepting "the reality of the country she is in, and . . . the inescapable doubleness of her own vision" (Susanna Moodie, p. 63). Mrs. Moodie's second voice is that of Canadian reality without pretence; it is linked to the natural cycle, and is a voice without illusion:

> The other voice
> had other knowledge:
> that men sweat
> always and drink often,
> that pigs are pigs
> but must be eaten
> anyway, that unborn babies
> fester like wounds in the body,
> that there is nothing to be done
> about mosquitoes . . .
> (Susanna Moodie, p. 42)

Yet Mrs. Moodie is unable to jettison her first voice, that idealized vision of Canada as a pastoral utopia where men work happily in the fields, secure in the knowledge that in time they will create a replica of England. Her attitude in Roughing It in the Bush is romanticized, idealized; mountains near the St. Lawrence, for instance, are "sprinkled over with neat cottages . . . the green slopes that spread around them are covered with flocks and herds."[10] However, she eventually realizes that to live in Canada she must retain a dual perception of appearance and reality; she knows that her role as both observer and citizen is integral to the Canadian experience. Her divided sensibility or cultural schizophrenia seems to be characteristic of Canada's development as an independent nation.

Mrs. Moodie's final comments in Journal III (1871-1969) describe her return to the land she once visited, and her sense of how Canada has changed. In "A Bus Along St. Clair: December," she appears as an old woman on a bus in Toronto; looking out of the window, she is unable to see the forest she once tried to conquer. Instead, she becomes, as Atwood puts it, "the spirit of the land" (Susanna Moodie, p. 64), and with her faceless, passive bewilderment we learn how the land itself has been destroyed:

> I am the old woman
> sitting across from you on the bus,
> her shoulders drawn up like a shawl;
> out of her eyes come secret
> hatpins, destroying
> the walls, the ceiling

> Turn, look down:
> there is no city;
> This is the centre of a forest
>
> your place is empty
> (Susanna Moodie, p. 61)

Through Atwood's old woman, history repeats itself; what she sees is the result of man's exploitation of what was once a natural landscape. As the poet explains in "Thoughts from Underground," the forest is now as "flat as highway billboards" (Susanna Moodie, p. 55), but man compensates for this by emphasizing instead our "natural resources, native industry, superior/ penitentiaries" which are making us "rich and powerful" (Susanna Moodie, p. 55). Yet this technological paradise is in its own way more forbidding than the forests Mrs. Moodie visited:

> Turn, look up
> through the gritty window: an unexplored
> wilderness of wires
>
> Though they buried me in monuments
> of concrete slabs, of cables
> though they moulded a pyramid
> of cold light over my head
> though they said, We will build
> silver paradise with a bulldozer
>
> it shows how little they know
> about vanishing: I have my
> ways of getting through.
> (Susanna Moodie, p. 60)

In "Visit to Toronto, with Companions," Mrs. Moodie visits the lunatic asylum, where she observes the inmates either sitting quietly or "crouching, thrashing,/ tearing off their clothes, screaming" (Susanna Moodie, p. 50); these are the new inhabitants of the technological city, and they are mad. And although she tries to escape from this atmosphere of madness, she is unable to do so; as she describes it, "the landscape was saying something/ but I couldn't hear" (Susanna Moodie, p. 51).

ATWOOD TRIES TO GO BEYOND MECHANIZED FRAGMENTATION TOWARDS A VISION OF UNITY

The new sensibility implies that man moves beyond mechanical technology towards a new, involved freedom. Atwood repudiates the separate roles of victim and killer in favour of a unifying, integrated role. She rejects the specialized roles of the mechanized age; as she told Graeme Gibson, the ideal role is a creative, humane one:

> . . . you can define yourself as innocent and get killed, or you can define yourself as a killer and kill others. I think there has to be a third thing again; the ideal would be somebody who would neither be a killer or a victim, who could achieve some kind of harmony with the world, which is a productive or creative harmony, rather than a destructive relationship towards the world.[11]

This appears clearly in Surfacing, in which Atwood's narrator tries to overcome her tendency to assume the victim role by identifying herself with a mythic landscape; she is opposed to the destructive roles of her friends. And we can trace the same wish for unity in Atwood's poetry, which attempts to go beyond images of fragmentation to a unifying, creative principle. "The idea," Atwood explained to Gibson, "would be to integrate yourself as a human being," and in The Edible Woman we see that Marian, by offering her final cake surrogate to Peter, is doing exactly that.[12] In Procedures for Underground (1970), we can trace the images of fragmentation and see how the poet tries to pass beyond them to a vision of unity.

The fragmented vision is a state of mind, and in this sense it creates a prison. Made by man and sustained by him, this vision sees life as a Charlie Chaplin movie, a framed, mechanical creation. In "Cyclops," for instance, man sees through a "single orange eye/ unable to see what is beyond" and he appears himself as "the hugest monster."[13] As we are told in "Frame," we create these fragmented perspectives for ourselves:

> I made this window;
> it stands in the middle of my floor.
> Around the edges it looks
> exactly like a window;
>
> on it I can see
> a street, a sidewalk, a blue corner
> where birds fly with the jerkiness
> of home movies . . .
> (Procedures, p. 21)

The poet asks "who left me here? Who gave me/ these scissors," and she dreams "always of getting outside" (Procedures, p. 21). Yet "nothing opens," and she is left not knowing "who to forgive" (Procedures, p. 21). The figures of man's world are cardboard stereotypes, and as we see them in "Interview with a Tourist," all the "men are starved and silver/ and have goggle eyes" and their women are only "cold tentacled flowers" (Procedures, p. 23). These figures appear in "Frame" as the stereotypes of North

American popular culture, for they mirror the poet's awareness of her limited vision:

> the houses where I once lived
> cut out of magazines
> lined up, one
> beside the other;
>
> cardboard figures
> of myself, unnaturally short
> are propped on each of the lawns
> with their backs towards me.
> (Procedures, p. 21)

Atwood uses images taken from common life in order to describe her view of man as living in a cardboard, disposable environment which he comes more and more to resemble. His archetypes become those of Consumer Reports and of advertising; his symbols are those of materialism and waste. In "Weed Seeds Near a Beaver Pond," we view man obsessed with his possessions, his money, and we find him using these entities as symbolic armour against self-knowledge. Many of these symbols are symbiotic, for he cannot live without them, and they are indeed technological extensions of him:

> and objects/ barnacles
> cups and saucers, plates latch
> on to me
>
> and when I moved to this city they
> moved with me, my skin
> is burred with porcelain and gleams
>
> like scales. like money. too many
> layers of things, too much
> time, too heavy
>
> (will they fall off, return to their own
> cardboard boxes, loosen
> the calendars from me) . . .
> (Procedures, pp. 30-31)

As the poet puts it, "I've been used./ two of the dishes broke. replacements" (Procedures, p. 31), for she identifies her own perceptions with the possessions around her. These poems are explorations of how we view stereotypes, the images thrust upon us by the advertising media and popular culture. In "Comic Books vs. History," the archetypal hero is one from a comic book; the modern city creates its own myths, but later these collapse "inside/ their rubber suits" and the poet finds only "real-sized explorers, confined/ to animal skin coats" (Procedures, pp. 48-49).

Yet in spite of this stereotyping, we see that the poet is determined to break away from a life of fragmentation. Although she knows that her symbols are those of the comic book and of advertising, she is convinced that she must re-create her universe according to her own indigenous myths. As she points out in "Spell for the Director of Protocol," most of the time her perceptions can be described by a "white comic-strip balloon/ with a question mark; or a blank button" (Procedures, p. 45), but she is convinced of her ability to survive this fragmentation. And in so doing she tries to overcome the barriers preventing her own self-knowledge, as we are told in "Hypothesis: City":

> To get out of this fear enclosing
> me like rubber, like a diving
> suit, the breath
> measured and strapped on my shoulders
>
> to get rid of the spear
>
> and swim the city freely, among
> its people, the streets, rooms,
> as though it were entirely natural . . .
> (Procedures, p. 36)

Entering closely into her natural surroundings, she wishes to "be everywhere and nothing" (Procedures, p. 37); instead of being concerned with images of consumer life, she tries to identify with her own mythic symbols. She herself is "diffused, washing in waves of light across the ceiling" (Procedures, p. 37), for in defining the unifying principle she must enter into it.

In the poem "Highest Altitude," we find that the poet uses the image of a mountain lookout to suggest her identity with natural, indigenous symbols. Carrying only what she needs for the trip and hence forgetting her symbols of urban life, the traveller finds that her point of view becomes fused with her natural environment, and this fusion lends to her experience a new intensity. Indeed, she feels a sense of community with her companions, a feeling totally absent in the trials of Atwood's narrator in Surfacing. But in these poems, man sees that his own symbols must be found within nature; these are the indigenous gods, and for the poet they are the only true gods:

> The view to the side, below,
> would be, as they say, breath-
>
> taking; if we dared to look.
> We don't dare. The curved
>
> ledge is crumbling, the melting snow
> is undermining the road,
>
> in fear everything
> lives, impermanence
> makes the edges of things burn
>
> brighter. The rocks are purple, heart-
> red. We hold our eyes tight
> to the line; the reference point

> not the mountain but the moving
> car, and each other.
> (Procedures, p. 56)

Through this sort of unity we may find the archetypal patterns, the true gods, and we may define our experience by these gods. Yet the struggle to overcome fragmentary aspects of urban life is difficult, and man must be patient. As the poet tells us in "For Archeologists," there are "folded skeletons arranged/ in ritual patterns, waiting/ for the patient searcher to find them" (Procedures, p. 72), but in the chaos of modern urban life it is hard indeed to live as a patient, determined searcher. We are rather more likely to succumb to the form of panic described by Atwood in Surfacing.

MECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY SPLITS THE HUMAN EGO INTO OPPOSING SELVES

When Atwood was discussing the role of the victim with Graeme Gibson, she said that "the other thing you do, if you are defining yourself as innocent, you refuse to accept power."[14] And as she also pointed out, her protagonist in Surfacing finally accepts a kind of power, the "responsibility of action," and hence is able to overcome her feelings of persecution.[15] Indeed, in that novel, as in Atwood's poetry, we can see that the acceptance of the victim role is an abdication from power and hence from responsibility. In any refusal to accept power man refuses to act, and is actually paralysed. The poems of Atwood's collection Power Politics (1972) explore the question of how we approach power; as the poet points out in one of the book's many untitled poems, "I rest here without power/ to save myself."[16]

Abdication from power is seen as a split in man's personality into the detached, analytical self and the destructive self, the source of power. The destructive self, or alter ego, appears in these poems as a mysterious lover whom the poet tries incessantly to understand, since she is unable to forget his presence. The alter ego mirrors the poet's own personality; as we are told, "you refuse to own/ yourself, you permit/ others to do it for you" (Power Politics, p. 30). This distinction between aspects of the personality is hard to categorize, for as we see in "He is a Strange Biological Phenomenon" it is constantly changing:

> Like eggs and snails you have a shell
> you are widespread
> and bad for the garden,
> hard to eradicate
>
> Scavenger, you feed
> only on dead meat:
>
> Your flesh by now
> is pure protein
> smooth as gelatin
> or the slick bellies of leeches . . .
> (Power Politics, p. 8)

Addressing the alter ego, the poet says later in the poem that "you have/ no chlorophyll; you move/ from place to place like a disease" (Power Politics, p. 8). And by speaking directly to the alter ego, the poet brings us closer to related halves of man's personality. We see how that part of ourselves, the part dealing with rituals and conventions, is false, and in one poem Atwood uses the image of an eighteenth century room to convey a sense of fragility and social artificiality. By using these social rituals we avoid confronting the whole question of power, and we identify ourselves with artifacts as protection. "You stay closed, your skin is buttoned firmly around you," we are told, "you are in the worst possible taste" (Power Politics, p. 44). And it appears that even the power symbols of urban man, the comic book heroes and advertising stereotypes, are largely retreats into this sort of social posturing:

> They were all inaccurate:
>
> the hinged bronze man, the fragile man
> built of glass pebbles,
> the fanged man with his opulent capes and boots
>
> Peeling away from you in scales.
>
> It was my fault but you helped,
> you enjoyed it.
> (Power Politics, p. 55)

Many of these poems suggest both the fragility of man's power symbols and their importance to him. But when the poet tries to confront the question of power, she finds that it is difficult to reach. The alter ego follows her "down streets, hallways, melting/ when I touch you," and asks her for "love without mirrors" (Power Politics, p.55), for an end to romantic illusion. But the poet-fugitive instead wishes to perpetuate the idea of the alter ego as a source of power, and refuses to come to terms with reality.

She is divided two ways: she wants to understand the question of power, and yet when that question presents itself she will not recognize her own evasions as a refusal to accept power. This is a basic duality in Atwood's poetry; as in "The Double Voice" in The Journals of Susanna Moodie, the poet implies that in order to live man must learn to accept himself as divided, for only in this way can he understand the tensions of modern life.

The alter ego itself is the symbol of destruction; it is the energy of creation misguided, and has great intensity. The figures in Atwood's poems move in a world where the influence of a free, unspoiled nature is opposed to the malignant influence of urban civilization. Man has the power, the poet tells us, yet he misuses it and hence turns his creative energy to destructive ends. The image of power becomes a distorted, uncontrolled monster, and the poet must withdraw from this in order to exist as an artist:

> You are the sun
> in reverse, all energy
> flows into you and is
> abolished; you refuse
> houses, you smell of
> catastrophe, I see you
> blind and one-handed, flashing
> in the dark, trees breaking
> under your feet, you demand,
> you demand
>
> I lie mutilated beside
> you; beneath us there are
> sirens, fires, the people run
> squealing, the city
> is crushed and gutted,
> the ends of your fingers bleed
> from 1000 murders . . .
> (Power Politics, p. 47)

The poet is amazed to find that if she withdraws from this use of power she is still able to proceed with her life as if little has happened. As she tells us, "I am amazed/ I can continue/ to think, eat, anything," though she reflectively wonders "how can I stop you/ why did I create you" (Power Politics, p. 47). After she has seen the misuse of power she prefers to retreat, seclude herself, and assume the role of victim. Her answer to the dilemma of how to control power tends to be not action, but rather a vague kind of objectivity. That part of ourselves we do not understand, the poet tells us, we prefer not to see.

But there is no denying the existence and force of Atwood's destructive alter ego; it is the voice we frequently hear in the darker works of Melville, Poe, and Hawthorne. When Huck Finn visits the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons he meets the same destructive force, hidden as it is beneath a mantle of false gentility, and he finds he must escape by returning to the river. In Atwood's poetry, the alter ego appears through modern symbols, yet its intensity is similar; in "He Is Last Seen," for instance:

> You walk towards me
> carrying a new death
> which is mine and no-one else's;
>
> Your face is silver
> and flat, scaled like a fish
>
> The death you bring me
> is curved, it is the shape
> of doorknobs, moons
> glass paperweights

> Inside it, snow and lethal
> flakes of gold fall endlessly
> over an ornamental scene,
> a man and a woman, hands joined and running. . .
> (Power Politics, p. 56)

These images of modern industrial life are what McLuhan describes in The Mechanical Bride as "folklore of industrial man." Death itself appears in symbols suggesting bureaucratic power: glass paperweights, doorknobs, and glass doors. They are hard, sterile images, yet they are the images of power, and they are also the images of destruction. If man is to live in modern urban society he cannot escape from this duality; if he tries to escape from society he faces the dilemmas of Atwood's narrator in Surfacing, and risks avoiding power and thus action. Addressing the alter ego, the poet says:

> You attempt merely power
> you accomplish merely suffering
>
> How long do you expect me to wait
> while you cauterize your
> senses, one
> after another
> turning yourself to an
> impervious glass tower?
> (Power Politics, p. 32)

In his concern for power, therefore, man himself becomes the machine. But if he avoids the exercise of power he remains a perpetual victim, and his objectivity about the misuse of power is an illusion.

MECHANICAL TECHNOLOGY CAN MAKE MAN INTO A TECHNOLOGICAL ROBOT

As McLuhan points out, the various technologies man has created extend his power and lead to a new type of freedom. The new electronic technology frees man from the tedium of the mechanical age; repetitive mechanical tasks can be done by sophisticated machines. Power is transmitted through electronic circuitry, which allows man to control his technologies from a distance. Simultaneity in experience begins to take the place of chronological repetition as the new electronic media present various levels of experience. Yet as Margaret Atwood stresses in her latest book of poetry, You Are Happy (1974), man often becomes a victim of the technologies he has created. Defining his life by means of consumer items, man is trapped by the advertising on the new electronic media. Experience is defined in the symbols of a huge technological junk pile. Indeed, the situation is similar to that in Kroetsch's Gone Indian, where discarded technologies become the landscape. But though Jeremy Sadness is able to free himself through his trusty tape recorder, Atwood's personae can only become machines themselves. In a universe of rapidly shifting technologies, they become technological robots who have amputated their feelings.

The world of Atwood's personae is a technological nightmare in which technology has begun to self-destruct. In the poem "Four Evasions," we are told that "airplane makes it off/ the runway, cars & houses deflate,/ diesel air & stale upholstery/ smell of you still on my skin."[17] The technologies we have created, the cars and planes, have started to pollute the universe. When we discard them, they define our history in a huge junk pile. In "Gothic Letter on a Hot Night," we see "destroyed houses, smashed plates, calendars,/ dinted clothes with their vacant necks,/ beds smeared with new bodies" (You Are Happy, pp. 14-15). Each item in the technological garbage pile has assumed a personality of its own. In "Chaos Poem" a house is littered with "damp towels on the chairs, cat fur/ matted in corners, dishes/ eaten off, crusted,/ books abandoned and bent open" (You Are Happy, p. 12). Modern man throws away the food he cannot eat and the technologies he cannot use. The poem "Digging" is a hymn to the refuse of the technological age:

> In this yard, barnyard
> I dig with a shovel
>
> beside the temple to the goddess
> of open mouths: decayed
> hay, steaming
> in the humid sunlight, odour
> of mildewed cardboard.
>
> filling a box with rotted dung
> to feed the melons.
>
> I dig because I hold grudges
> I dig with anger
> I dig because I am hungry,
> the dungpile scintillates with flies.
>
> I try to ignore my sour clothes,
> the murky bread devoured
> at those breakfasts, drinking orange
> and black acid, butter
> tasting of silt, refrigerators,
> old remorse
> (You Are Happy. p. 19)

As the poet tells us in "Pig Song," "if you feed me garbage,/ I will sing a song of garbage" (You Are Happy,

p. 30). Surrounded by the artifacts of discarded mechanical technologies, man becomes a discard himself. A woman in the"Circe/ Mud Poems" is "waxing and waning/ like an inner tube or a mother" and is "surrounded by bowls, bowls, bowls" (You Are Happy, p. 65). Her face, it appears, is floating "on the water/ dissolving like a paper plate" (You Are Happy, p. 65). In this latest book of poems, Atwood shows she is highly suspicious of the new freedom given man by the new technology. When technology becomes a religion, it destroys the very freedom it is supposed to define. "Love is not a profession" and "sex is not dentistry/ the slick filling of aches and cavities," the poet tells us in "Is/ Not" (You Are Happy, p. 74) and we recognize the concerns also discussed in The Edible Woman and in Surfacing. Atwood has always been slow to accept the new technology; we recall that The Edible Woman is a tentative, rather dated novel about how a young woman reacts to the view of herself as a consumer item. And if the new technology makes woman edible and she becomes a victim, her life is defined by a fear of the power of the new media.

Yet ironically Atwood's awareness of technology's power does not prevent her from using new images, new media in her own style. Her work has always had a strong photographic element; in "Memory," a poem appears as a print slowly being developed in the darkroom. "You exist/ again, my entire skin/ sensitive as an eye," she tells us, "imprint of you/ glowing against me,/ burnt-out match in a dark room" (You Are Happy, p. 11). The two-dimensional photographic image assumes a new organic life as it reaches the printed page. But the poem is still only an image confined to the medium of print. As in the novels of Robert Kroetsch, art becomes a mirror of life, a mirror containing images almost impossible to capture. "I enter with you/ and become a mirror," the poet tells us in "Tricks with Mirrors," for "mirrors/ are the perfect lovers" (You Are Happy, p. 24). The image reflected in the mirror becomes a frightening reminder of man as a technological robot:

> My face, my other faces
> stretching over it like
> rubber, like flowers opening
> and closing, like rubber,
> like liquid steel,
> like steel. Face of steel.
>
> Look at me and see your reflection.
> (You Are Happy, p. 56)

In motion, the images of Atwood's poems form a filmic record of man as victim of the new technology. Using the telephoto lens the poet can focus on minute expressions, tiny details of the technological nightmare. Landscape assumes the artificial reality of a movie set; it cannot be trusted. In the poem "Newsreel: Man and Firing Squad," the poet as film director asks for "no more of these closeups, this agony/ taken just for the record anyway" (You Are Happy, p. 9). The electronic media of the new technology bring the news of the world into every man's living room.

Most of Atwood's poetry reinforces this view of man as a technological robot trapped in a mechanical nightmare.

Birds fly "with their razor-blue/ feathers, their beaks like stabs, their eyes/ red as the food of the dead" (You Are Happy, p. 62), and man is continually oppressed; he is often associated with an animal as victim of modern technology. Many of the poems in You Are Happy provide voices of particular animals and birds as they flee from the mechanized hunter. For as we will see in The Edible Woman, Surfacing, and Survival, man is the hunter as well as the victim. Devoid of feelings he is "like a hand/ cut off at the wrist" (You Are Happy, p. 58); extending the self through technology leads to a lack of human emotion. As technology triumphs, the human body becomes obsolete, an artifact with "grey animal fur hands/ on their hands, blades on their feet,/ they let us warp them/ for purposes of display or science" (You Are Happy, p. 72). "Because their owners have abandoned them/ in favour of word games or jigsaw puzzles" (You Are Happy, p. 72), human bodies form technological discards. Like Peter in The Edible Woman and the American hunters in Surfacing, those who survive are technological extensions themselves:

> in the hard slot of your mouth
> your teeth remain fixed,
> zippered to a silver curve;
> nothing rusts.
>
> Through two holes in the leather
> the discs of your eyes gleam
> white as dulled quartz;
> you wait
>
> the fist stutters, gives up,
> you are not visible

> You unbuckle the fingers of the fist,
> you order me to trust you.
> (You Are Happy, p. 57)

THE EDIBLE WOMAN TYPIFIES GUTENBERG MAN IN HIS APPROACH TO THE NEW SENSIBILITY

Even in the later poetry, Atwood is skeptical of man's new power in the technological age. She often retreats into hesitancy in exploring the new media; she is part of the new sensibility, but her acceptance is accompanied by various doubts. When we turn to her prose, however, we find that the distinctions between her various works are marked. In The Edible Woman, a woman from the old sensibility confronts the new technology and withdraws, afraid; in Surfacing, Atwood makes a definite break with this hesitancy and writes as a member of the counter-culture. Yet her recent critical work, Survival, depends largely on an imposed mechanical structure. The Edible Woman is an appropriate starting point for a view of Atwood's prose. As in the poetry, there is Atwood's concern for the roles we assume, the games we play, and the fragmentation of the human sensibility. But Atwood's approach to technology in her first novel seems dated, mannered; and significantly Atwood herself has compared the book to an eighteenth century comedy:

> . . . in your standard eighteenth century comedy you have a young couple who is faced with difficulty in the form of somebody who embodies the restrictive forces of society and they trick or overcome this difficulty and end up getting married. The same

> thing happens in The Edible Woman except the wrong person gets married. And the person who embodies the restrictive forces of society is in fact the person Marian gets engaged to. In a standard comedy, he would be the defiant hero. As it is, he and the restrictive society are blended into one and the comedy solution would be a tragic solution for Marian.[18]

As she would be in an eighteenth century comedy, Marian is confronted with a silly, irrelevant social situation in which both her job and her friends seem meaningless, and only by detached, objective humour is she able to live within this trap.[19] Her room-mate Ainsley tests electric toothbrushes; her own job is even worse, for she works for "Seymour Surveys," a market research firm, and spends her time writing commercials for inedible products, answering letters from irate consumers, and visiting people to test particular types of advertising. She describes her company as "layered like an ice-cream sandwich, with three floors: the upper crust, the lower crust, and our department, the gooey layer in the middle."[20] Lost in this huge bureaucracy and surrounded by narrow-minded office workers, she is asked to survey the worth of commercials like the following one for "Moose Beer":

> Any real man, on a real man's holiday--hunting, fishing, or just plain old-fashioned relaxing--needs a beer with a healthy, hearty taste, a deep-down manly flavour. The first long cool swallow will tell you that Moose Beer is just what you've always wanted for true beer enjoyment. Put the tang of the wilderness in YOUR life today with a big satisfying glass of sturdy Moose Beer.
>
> Tingly, heady,
> Rough-and-ready,
> Moose, Moose, Moose, Moose, BEER!!!
> (Edible Woman, p. 26)

Atwood told Graeme Gibson that her protagonist in Surfacing had gone through Marian's experiences, and for that protagonist society indeed becomes evil.[21] In The Edible Woman, society is a trap, and Marian's image of herself is often that of a trapped, caged victim. Since she is known to her friends as a sensible, practical girl, she is expected to marry her fiancé Peter, a man she actually dislikes, for she suspects he thinks of her as only a "fixture" (Edible Woman, p. 62). "Most women are pretty scatterbrained but you're such a sensible girl," Peter tells her. "You may not have known this but I've always thought that's the first thing to look for when it comes to choosing a wife" (Edible Woman, p. 89). In her attempt to escape from Peter, Marian spends time with Duncan, a disillusioned graduate student who is opposed to the accepted values of urban life; as he puts it, "the human mind was the last thing to be commercialized but they're doing a good job of it now" (Edible Woman, p. 143). But everything she does in the city--visiting the hairdresser, going to parties, visiting the laundromat--reminds her of her own captivity. At the hairdresser's, for instance, she becomes a part of "the assembly-line of women seated in identical mauve chairs under identical whirring mushroom-shaped machines" (Edible Woman, pp. 209-210).

The main symbol of her trap is her fiancé Peter, the polite, neat, successful young lawyer whose apartment, and life-style, are sterile. He is a plastic man, a bureaucratic stereotype: "Ainsley had once called him 'nicely packaged,' but now Marian decided that she found this quality attractive. He knew how to blend in and stand out at the same time" (Edible Woman, p. 146). Although Peter is upset when his old friend Trigger gets married, he assures Marian that he himself will be an excellent husband and "provider." Soon Marian will be able to move out of her own apartment, which "lacks unity," he tells her (Edible Woman, p. 41), and into his. Yet Marian becomes increasingly aware of another side of Peter's personality which bothers her even more than his bureaucratic habits. For he has a destructive streak and she realizes that he is the trapper, she the victim. In conversation at a bar, she overhears his dehumanized attitude to hunting:

> "So I whipped out my knife, good knife, German steel, and slit the belly and took her by the hind legs and gave her one hell of a crack, like a whip you see, and the next thing you know there was blood and guts all over the place. All over me, what a mess, rabbit guts dangling from the trees, god the trees were red for yards. . . ."
> (Edible Woman, p. 69)

This is the destruction we see in the meaningless killing of Surfacing; the implication is thatthis attitude is endemic to urban civilization. When man's outlook is dehumanized, sterile, the decisions he makes are based on efficiency and on his own power. At one point Marian even identifies Peter with a mysterious caller at work known as the Underwear Man, for she realizes that with her humanistic outlook she does not really know him.

Other characters in the novel reinforce her opposition to modern, urban values. Her friend Clara, who seems to be perpetually pregnant, is a "strange vegetable growth, a bulbous tuber" (Edible Woman, p. 32), and is dissatisfied with her role as a housewife. Her room-mate Ainsley devises an elaborate plan to trap Len, a cynical ladies' man, into becoming the father of her child, since she believes he has acceptable genes. As Ainsley puts it, "we know the human race is degenerating, and it's all because people pass on their weak genes without thinking about it" (Edible Woman, p. 43). As a symbol of a modern, emancipated woman Ainsley is credible, but her values are those Marian does not want. Indeed, she rejects Ainsley's amateur psychology as the way to explore the dilemmas of her own life.

Atwood told Graeme Gibson that in The Edible Woman Marian is "evading, avoiding, running away, retreating, withdrawing" from problems confronting her, and we can see that Marian takes evasive action when life threatens her.[22] In this she takes the same path as the misguided Harry Angstrom of John Updike's Rabbit, Run, a former basketball player who is unable to recapture the sense of accomplishment he had in high school. Feeling that she is being irrevocably pushed towards marriage, Marian runs away from her friends at a party, hides childishly under a bed, and day-dreams while she is at work. As the novel puts it, "she could feel time eddying and curling almost visibly around her feet, rising around her, lifting her body in the office-chair and bearing her, slowly and circuitously but with the inevitability of water moving downhill, towards the distant, not-so-distant day they had agreed on" (Edible Woman, p. 115). Hence she spends more and more time with Duncan, who is the antithesis of Peter, for Duncan lives in an untidy apartment, is unsuccessfully trying to get through graduate school, and is totally disillusioned with stereotypes of social success and role playing. Filled with panic at the thought of meeting Peter's conventional friends, Marian finally goes to Duncan's apartment as a refuge. There, as one of Duncan's eccentric friends has already told her, there is at least a sense that she can "return to the tribe, the old gods, the dark earthgods, the earth goddess, the goddess of waters, the goddess of birth and growth and death" (Edible Woman, p. 200). Such ideas would never be discussed by Peter and his friends.

The final symbol of the novel, the cake Marian deliberately bakes and then offers to Peter, is as Atwood points out a "substitute for herself."[23] From the archetypes of the consumer world she makes an image of herself, since until she meets Duncan these archetypes have defined her life:

> In the supermarket she went relentlessly up and down the aisles, relentlessly out-manoeuvring the muskrat-furred ladies, edging the Saturday children to the curb, picking the things off the shelves. Her image was taking shape. Eggs. Flour. Lemons for the flavour. Sugar, icing-sugar, vanilla, salt, food-colouring. She wanted everything new, she didn't want to use anything that was already in the house. Chocolate--no, cocoa, that would be better. A glass tube full of

> round silver decorations. Three nesting plastic bowls, teaspoons, aluminum cake-decorator and a cake tin. Lucky, she thought, they sell almost everything in supermarkets these days.
> (Edible Woman, p. 267)

Finally when she has finished making the cake she offers it to Peter, explaining "you've been trying to destroy me . . . you've been trying to assimilate me. But I've made you a substitute, something you'll like much better. This is really what you wanted all along, isn't it?" (Edible Woman, p. 271). When Peter leaves in alarm, she eats the cake herself, "neatly severing the body from the head" (Edible Woman, p. 273). By consuming the cake she is symbolically destroying a surrogate past, as the narrator in Surfacing does when she unrolls her friends' film, "Random Samples"; both protagonists try to destroy records of their own lives in urban society. And yet in both novels the solution is ambiguous. In Surfacing the narrator decides she must return to the city; and in The Edible Woman Marian, after quitting her job and cancelling her marriage plans, offers the remainder of the symbolic cake to Duncan, who begins to remind us ominously of Peter: "He scraped the last chocolate curl up with his fork and pushed away the plate. 'Thank you,' he said, licking his lips. 'It was delicious.'" (Edible Woman, p. 281). Marian's difficulties with the consumer culture, it seems, have not yet ended.

THE ECOLOGICAL POSITION OFFERS AN ALTERNATIVE TO URBAN TECHNOLOGY

In The Edible Woman, Marian evaded the technological aspects of the new sensibility. Yet she seemed to have no clear alternative to the mechanized forces destroying her life. The process is carried further in Atwood's latest novel, Surfacing (1972), in which ecological issues offer alternatives to technological dehumanization. The new sensibility implies commitment, participation; and Surfacing offers a withdrawal from society instead of a surrender to mechanical technology. Rather than resigning himself to the role of passive victim, man can create a significant counter-structure. In Surfacing, Atwood attempts to present, by means of an internal monologue, the struggles of a woman who feels victimized by urban society, and her attempt to escape by identifying herself with the gods of primitive history and myth. The novel takes the form of a quest in which the narrator, along with three insensitive urbanized friends, goes on a trip into the wilderness of northern Quebec. But during the trip the narrator prefers to remain aloof from her friends, for they represent to her the urban, technological mentality she is trying to leave behind. As Phyllis Grosskurth points out, in this novel the term "American" is used to represent both Canadian and American urban behaviour; the implication is that Canadian and American city-dwellers are indistinguishable.[24] And the ideals of this society are closely related to technological progress, as Atwood explained to Graeme Gibson:

> The gods are--I think a kind of futile adjustment is probably the god. It used to be success. It used to be the individualist kind of thing where you went out and stomped on everyone and made a million dollars, but that isn't even the god anymore. I think the god is probably fitting into the machine. . . . You can be part of the machine or you can be something that gets run over by it.[25]

The narrator is a commercial artist who adopts a variety of styles while painting in the city, but who finds that in the wilderness she can produce little but caricatures. She knows that the usual rituals of urban society--marriage, hunting for sport, sexual freedom--have little interest for her. Her marriage, for example, has brought little but regimentation, and as she complains, "love without fear, sex without risk, that's what they wanted to be true; and they almost did it, I thought, they almost pulled it off, but as in magicians' tricks or burglaries half-success is failure and we're back to other things."[26] And since she sees urban life as a gigantic circle game of ritual and hypocrisy, she avoids her three friends who are incessantly concerned with only these qualities.

However, as we have seen in Atwood's poetry, the state of victimization is not inevitable.[27] As the novel ends, the narrator tells us that the important thing is "above all, to refuse to be a victim" (Surfacing, p. 191). The mythologized Canadian landscape represents to her emotion, security; indeed, just those values urban society lacks.[28]

The narrator tries to identify herself with the natural forces around her, and says at one point, "I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place" (Surfacing, p. 181). As Atwood told Graeme Gibson, man can choose not to be a victim:

> Evil obviously exists in the world. . . . But you have a choice of how you can see yourself in relation to that. And if you define yourself always as a harmless victim, there's nothing you can ever do about it. You can simply suffer . . . only if you stop defining yourself as a victim you know, fated by powers that be can you act.[29]

There is an identification here, common in Canadian and American literature, between the values of freedom and those of the forest. In Surfacing this leads to a tension between the values of the city and those of the forest, for the artist-heroine cannot remain aesthetically honest in the city. The city is too formal, too stratified for artistic exploration. During her quest for her missing father, we find that he also wanted "the borders abolished . . . the forest to flow back into the places his mind cleared: reparation" (Surfacing, p. 186). Yet in the city the artist is surrounded by men who behave as machines, and as the narrator says, "they are halfway to machine, the left-over flesh atrophied and diseased, porous-like and appendix" (Surfacing, p. 184). In her interview with Gibson, Atwood said that urban man is only a worker in a gigantic factory, and implied that the mechanical age, rather than the post-mechanical age of McLuhan, is still with us:

> But some guy who is doing nothing but punching little holes in cards all day, he has no connection with himself at all, and guys who sit around . . . in an office all day have no contact with their own bodies, and they are really deprived, they're functions, functions of a machine.[30]

There is a strong anti-rational drive in Atwood's writing; this appears most obviously in Surfacing, and it often gives the impression of myopic primitivism. The narrator's friends are far from ideal, but Atwood seems unable to offer any solution other than a ritual immersion in wilderness life and then a return to society. One explanation may be that the narrator feels compelled to do penance for the sins of her friends. "I didn't want there to be wars and death," she says, "I wanted them not to exist . . . I felt a sickening complicity" (Surfacing, pp. 130-131). Atwood told Graeme Gibson that one problem she was interested in was original sin:

> It all comes back to original sin . . . it depends on whether you define yourself as intrinsically innocent, and if you define yourself as intrinsically innocent, then you have a lot of problems, because in fact you aren't. And the thing with her is she wishes not to be human. She wishes to be not human, because being human inevitably means being guilty, and if you define yourself as innocent, you can't accept that.[31]

Atwood's narrator is convinced that rational thought is irrelevant since rationalism has led to the evils against which she is reacting. "From any rational point of view I am absurd; but there are no longer any rational points of view" (Surfacing, p. 169), she assures herself, yet she oversimplifies in her attempt to describe her own philosophy. Indeed, she often reminds us of the values she is supposedly fighting. All too often her vituperations seem to be a poor alternative to the urban life she dislikes, and the presentation of only her point of view in the novel gives her a messianic intensity.

In her attempt to escape from what she feels is urban society's obsession with progress, she turns to the past, and we often see her leafing through her family photograph albums and recalling episodes in her family life. She has visions of her parents, and of her brother, and she searches for some ancient cave paintings in which her father had been interested. These are her gods, her intrinsic symbols of Canadian experience, as Atwood explained to Gibson:

> Everybody has gods or a god, and it's what you pay attention to or what you worship. And they can be imported ones or they can be intrinsic ones, indigenous ones. . . . And if you import a god from somewhere else, it's false, it's like importing your culture from somewhere else. The only sort of good, authentic kind of thing to have is something that comes out of the place where you are, or shall we put it another way and say the reality of your life. . . . the imported gods will always tell you . . . to destroy what is there, to destroy what is in the place and to make a replica of the god's place. . . . And I think that the authentic religion that was here has been destroyed.[32]

As an alternative to the urban gods, therefore, Atwood presents other, more primitive ones, and these are most clearly symbolized by an underwater vision the narrator has while she is searching for primitive cave paintings. The result of her quest for her father is a surrealistic, ambiguous re-awakening of her imagination:

> Pale green, then darkness, layer after layer, deeper than before, seabottom; the water seemed to have thickened, in it pin-prick lights flicked and darted, red and blue, yellow and white, and I saw they were fish, the chasm-dwellers, fins lined with phosphorescent sparks, teeth neon. It was wonderful that I was down so far, I watched the fish, they swam like patterns on closed eyes, my legs and arms were weightless, free-floating; I almost forgot to look for the cliff and the shape.
>
> It was there but it wasn't a painting, it wasn't on the rock. It was below me, drifting towards me from the furthest level where there was no life, a dark oval trailing limbs. It was blurred but it had eyes, they were open, it was something I knew about, a dead thing, it was dead.
>
> (Surfacing, p. 142)

Her immersion in the destructive element brings her new awareness as she leaves this vision of death and rises to the surface, and her redemption comes through expiation and the exorcism of false, imported technological gods. Finally freeing herself from these, she unravels her companions' film, "Random Samples," and to complete the rite of purification destroys the contents of her father's cabin and discards her wedding ring: "I slip the ring from my left hand, non-husband, he is the next thing I must discard finally, and drop into the fire, altar, it may not melt but it will at least be purified, the blood will burn off" (Surfacing, p. 176). In talking to Gibson about her interest in ghost stories, Atwood said she was interested in the ghost that is a "fragment of one's own self which has split off"; and her narrator in Surfacing is able to regain, perhaps for only a short time, that part of herself denied by urban life.[33] Yet in reading the novel one must remember that at its end the narrator returns to the city.

and in that return she may well lose her newly found indigenous gods. Her struggle is interesting, however, since it shows a woman trying to offer alternatives to the urban way of life.

ATWOOD'S CRITIQUE, SURVIVAL, OFFERS US A KEY TO HER OWN WRITING

Much of Atwood's writing is concerned with man's survival in a threatening technological universe. The poetry is her most articulate expression of this theme, but both The Edible Woman and Surfacing explore the perceptions of characters who feel trapped by a universe they do not understand. Atwood's critical study, Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (1972), further emphasizes her interest in the mechanism of human survival. Using the thematic approach suggested by Northrop Frye in The Bush Garden and D. G. Jones in Butterfly on Rock, Atwood suggests that the basic metaphor in Canadian literature is the fact of survival against landscape, urban values, and even other nations. Beginning with James Polk's thesis about animal victims in "Lives of the Hunted," she suggests that in Canada we have both animal and human victims.[34] In fact, Canada herself is a collective victim of the United States. Although to most critics of Canadian culture this is not new, the informal, non-evaluative approach Atwood uses--along with titles like "Nature the Monster," "Animal Victims," and "The Paralysed Artist"--has made her book a frequently quoted source in articles about recent Canadian writing.

Her own examples are drawn from mainly contemporary English and French-Canadian literature.

The book itself is not very helpful as a work of criticism, but it tells one quite a lot about Atwood's own writing. Although her restrictive critical method makes one doubt that survival is the most important theme in Canadian writing, it obviously is one theme, especially in works like E. J. Pratt's The Titanic, Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel, and Sinclair Ross' As For Me and My House.[35] The particular intensity of these works depends on the use of survival as a metaphor, an idea discussed in most recent Canadian writing.

Since Atwood's thesis of "survival" is related to Northrop Frye's definition of the "garrison mentality," which seems to be a development of Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis," we can find parallels between Canadian literature and the nineteenth century American culture Turner used as his source.[36] Works like "A Descent Into the Maelstrom," Moby-Dick, and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn can all be discussed with reference to "survival," and there are resemblances between these works and the Canadian works used by Atwood. Although we might question the relevance of Turner's thesis in Canada, where the West was settled more peacefully than in the United States, the interest in "survival" in both nineteenth century America and modern Canada is obvious, and deserved to be explored. In other Commonwealth countries we can also see this metaphor used. It seems to arise when writers decide that they have their own literature, their own standards, and that their writing is the equal of any other. And as one can see in connection with recent developments in Canadian nationalism, a concern with "survival" gives an individual, country, or political group a certain confidence and strength.

In the sociological study Crowds and Power, Elias Canetti explores the meaning of survival itself. Although he uses survival on the battlefield as an example, his remarks can be extended to refer to any situation in which an individual differs from those who surround him. In the process of survival, Canetti suggests, an individual defies others, and if he can survive with his own philosophy he gains a certain power. In fact, says Canetti, "the moment of survival is the moment of power." The new strength of the survivor makes him a hero, the "favoured of the Gods."37 The narrator of Surfacing, for instance, is obsessed with survival as a woman, and she refuses to be a victim. In her poem "A Place: Fragments," however, Atwood tells us that the position of man as survivor is a perilous one:

> Watch that man
> walking on cement as though on snowshoes:
> senses the road
> a muskeg, loose mat of roots and brown
> vegetable decay
> or crust of ice that
> easily might break and
> slush of water under
> suck him down . . .
> (Circle Game, p. 73)

Behind man's tendency to build walls and shields for protection, we may discern how he protects himself by means of a supreme defence- mechanism. Although at times man conquers fear by keeping danger at a distance, he usually finds that seeking out danger, confronting it, and overcoming it gives him his greatest strength. In this way the survivor becomes the hero; and with each confrontation the survivor increases his invulnerability, and hence his power. With each new conquest, the hero increases his power and influence among those who have been following his exploits, for those who follow the hero wish him to be invulnerable. The survivor becomes more secure in the knowledge of his own power, and his followers become more convinced of his ability to lead them. And the survivor's conflicts may include various types of confrontation; the important fact is that he face death and re-establish his immortality.[38] If man cannot face the test, he lives in the world of Eliot's hollow men; but if man successfully opposes death and returns he has the strength of Atwood's narrator in Surfacing.

As Canetti explains, "the satisfaction in survival, which is a kind of pleasure, can become a dangerous and insatiable passion."[39] The survivor finds that in order to continue as a hero he must more frequently expose himself to danger, and this becomes an addiction. But because no man is personally able to overcome enough other men, the survivor must become the leader of a group founded on his authority. If he is victorious in a confrontation, both the victims of his own side and those of the opposing side testify to his renewed invulnerability as a survivor. When the victory is costly and produces many victims, the survivor's victory increases in significance. Indeed, the importance of his survival depends less on victory or defeat than on the number of victims he survives.[40]

In Surfacing, we see that the narrator is afflicted with this addiction to survival. We note her joy in knowing that she alone is a woodsman, that she alone is able to paddle a canoe, that she alone is able to escape from the influence of the urban city. When she finally leaves her friends and lives alone in her parents' cabin, she shows that her passion to gain invulnerability as a survivor has overcome even her will to live. Any survivor is an alien, an isolate, and his allegiance to the model of survival means that he is separate from his fellow men. And though he as archetypal survivor may avoid the role of victim for long periods of time, ultimately he too becomes a victim. In the twenties the victim was called the "hollow man," the "stuffed man"; today he may be as Michael Ondaatje describes him in "Peter":

> . . . a pendulum
> between the walls of the yard,
> rearing from shrinking flashes of steel
> until they, with a new science,
> stretched his heels and limbs,
> scarred through the backs of his knees
> leaving his veins unpinned,[41]
> and him singing in the evening air.

In Ondaatje's poetry and in that of Atwood, we have indeed what Siegfried Giedion once called "the mechanization of death."[42]

There are many different forms of survival, as Canetti points out. Beginning with conception, we pass on to life itself, with its ritualistic competition, and finally to death. At a certain level man competes within the crowd, as in a pack, but at the higher levels of survival the hero believes that survival is his sole right. Much heroic poetry celebrates the survivor who emerges victorious after battling against apparently overwhelming odds. In large scale confrontations, there are recurring stories of people who came back to life after being abandoned as victims, and such survivors often think of themselves as invulnerable.[43] This theme is especially clear in the works of Canadian Jewish writers, who often view themselves as ancestral survivors of the Nazi concentration camps. Their interest in survival as metaphor leads to recurring images of victimization, as in the novels of Richler or the poems of Layton. In Canetti's view, however, the only true survivor is the artist who lives on through the characteristics of his work.[44] Although in this way the artist is able to use survival as a metaphor for life, he as a man is able to avoid the games survivors have to play in order to define themselves.

CHAPTER IV

ROBERT KROETSCH: THE LIMITATIONS OF MEDIA

Most of the critical attention paid to Robert Kroetsch has been based on his third novel, The Studhorse Man, which received the Governor-General's Award for 1970. It has been praised as a complex work, and understandably so. Yet only a few critics have examined Kroetsch's two earlier novels--But We Are Exiles and The Words of My Roaring--as preludes to the achievement of The Studhorse Man, and there has been little comment on the sophisticated narrative method Kroetsch uses as he moves towards his most recognized work. Indeed, few critics have commented on his latest novel, Gone Indian, a work which explores the impact of the new sensibility on twentieth century man. If we examine the development of Kroetsch's technique as a novelist, beginning with But We Are Exiles and proceeding to Gone Indian, we find that he is much concerned with the idea of narrative voice and its effect on traditional realism. He attempts to develop a new language, a new voice; perhaps he is closer to the spoken than to the written word. Impatient with traditional forms of realism, which rely on conventional plots and characters, he uses instead the symbolic, the pictographic. His novels often seem more like attempts to explore experience than to define it.[1]

Kroetsch himself has stressed that Western Canadian novelists need to make a new literature out of a new type of experience.[2] His works explore the effects of experience through the eyes of specific individuals; if his novels define experience, these definitions are personal ones. We think of Jeremy Sadness, the isolated graduate student; or perhaps we recall the histrionics of the notorious studhorse man Hazard Lepage. And we think of the sense of voice in Gone Indian and in The Studhorse Man, and we realize that the perspectives on reality we see in these works depend largely on the voices of particular narrators or characters. Often that voice is a colloquial one and follows the rhythms of common speech; indeed, it is Kroetsch's contention that on the prairies "people talk about each other, not about what they saw on television or read about in the newspapers."[3] The relationships between the characters in his novels are viewed through this medium of ordinary speech, which is the communication link between them. In an interview with Margaret Laurence, Kroetsch stressed his interest in the story-teller's concern for what he called a "more profound" kind of realism:

> You and I, because we are western Canadians, are involved in making a new literature out of a new experience. As I explore that experience, trying to make both inward and outward connections, I see new possibilities for the story-teller. In the process I have become somewhat impatient with certain traditional kinds of realism, because I think there is a more profound kind available to us.[4]

Kroetsch claims that in his first novel, But We Are Exiles (1965), he was "unaware of being the outsider" who merely takes notes on the action--just as Demeter of

The Studhorse Man takes notes on the adventures of Hazard Lepage.[5] The discipline and order of the novel show, however, that in But We Are Exiles the author's deliberate non-involvement is an important characteristic of Kroetsch's aesthetic. Symbolic rather than realistic, But We Are Exiles explores the question of how we see reality and how we look beneath the surface of our own perception. The symbolism is dense and the narrative often interrupted; there are several layers of symbolism, and since we see through a narrator's perception our deficiencies in seeing are identical to his. The narrative technique in But We Are Exiles has been compared with that of Virginia Woolf, and we often find that the two writers are similar in the density they lend to their styles.[6]

Although the language of But We Are Exiles is simple, many words and passages carry a multiple significance.[7] Michael Hornyak's body is described only once, yet its presence casts a spell over the crew of the Nahanni Jane. On the realistic level Hornyak exists merely as a rival of the narrator, but symbolically he represents much more. For he is a reflection, a mirror, of the action in the novel. His death is symbolic, as is the recovery of his body. The surface of the river he drowns in provides an optical metaphor through which Kroetsch explores the difference between illusion and reality. In an interview with Donald Cameron, he discussed his interest in "surfaces":

> So that's what I aimed at, not a sparkly surface, but what would look like a simple, reliable surface, and I worked hard at getting that surface to carry the light. . . . In But We Are Exiles you have the literal surface of the water as your dividing point; you're above and you're below. . . . What the hell is beneath that incredible surface? Let's explore it. . . . In Exiles I was trying to show how we are exiled in many ways, but in one sense from our own night.[8]

Kroetsch reflects modern reality by placing his characters in a situation where they have none of the usual technological devices. Continually associating a broken lamp and light cord with Hornyak's death, the inhabitants of this fictional world live in the shadow of our own experience. The radio is their only connection with the outside world. Their world is one of reflections--of the past, the present, and the future. The narrator, Peter Guy, continually sees images that suggest his own complicity in Hornyak's death. He is a mirror for Hornyak; and the image of Peter is often confused with memories of Hornyak, evoking Peter's own insecurity and guilt. The image of a mirror is frequently used in the novel to reflect important events. When Peter first realizes that Hornyak has stolen his girl, Kettle, he looks "in on a mirror and the image of two raging bodies, a tumble of dark hair."[9] He tries to run away, but he is "caught there, trapped, doomed in that long mahogany frame" (Exiles, p. 145). The image of the lovers is "caught in a mirror" (Exiles, p. 27) as if it were a still taken from a film.

Kroetsch's technique of providing reflections of reality extends to the relationship between Peter Guy and his conscience. Since Hornyak is his image, his pattern of illusion, Peter hopes that the past life of Hornyak is similar to his own complex of anxieties and fears. In his relationship with Kettle, he is apt to view her as an image, as a part of his own imaginary mental landscape. For as in Tennyson's The Lady of Shalott, the mirror is illusion unclouded by reality. When it cracks, the internal perspective is destroyed. One of Peter's companions on the Nahanni Jane tries to destroy the mirror; in smashing his fist through it, Arnafson metaphorically attempts to escape from the image of Hornyak himself. Yet the mirror is still present, for the surface of the water itself forms a mirror. Above the surface is reality; below it is mystery, a mystery associated with Hornyak's death. Early in the novel, Peter looks into the water and sees not the corpse of Hornyak but "his own face watching him; the prematurely balding head, the full lips and squinting deep-set eyes suggesting a moodiness that didn't belong with his tall and hard body (Exiles, p. 2). Peter's quest as a pilot implies a symbolic search below surface realities towards deeper psychological truths:

> And when the forward barge hit a mudbank Peter discovered that the only channel through Beaver Lake was narrow and tricky; only a man with experience and judgment, who could read the meaning in a shade of colour, who could grip the wheel and guess his way below the surface--only he could take the heavily loaded barges through. The barge-loads of mining equipment and alkylate and lumber and clothing and dynamite and beer and foodstuffs for another year. He decided he must know this river, right to where in one last extravagance it flung all its beauty and violence and power and mystery into the Arctic Ocean; he would serve his apprenticeship and become a pilot.
>
> (Exiles, p. 123)

The dream of extravagance: it is also suggested by the North itself, which to twentieth century urban man is the last frontier. In this wilderness man can be reborn, can be made new again; as Peter remembers while musing on a trip he once took to the Columbia Icefields, "they had seen the water come new-born off the ice, after those thousands of years, and as it began its long tumble to the arctic sea they followed. They went with it. Down a long mountain trough. A new raw redness to the mountains and the smashed rock beside the new road" (Exiles, p. 49). In the old, dilapidated riverboat Nahanni Jane, herself a relic of the ash heaps of modern technology, Peter and his companions go on a symbolic quest for rebirth in a disintegrating world. Amid the smashed remnants of urban civilization the quest continues; smashed mirrors, twisted lamps, recalcitrant engines provide a grotesque landscape, a surrealistic reminder of the shift to a post-mechanical age. Krotesch is highly critical of man's dependance on urban technology, and implies we must reject such artifacts in order to gain self-realization.

In Gone Indian, Jeremy Sadness is symbolically trapped by the omnipresent tape recorder. The trap in But We Are Exiles is provided by the Mackenzie river itself. Although the river can define man as free from human relationships, it also simplifies those same relationships and thus presents a microcosm implying his essential function. In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, the Missouri river provides an escape from society, but it also leads to a more truthful relationship between Huck and Jim. Peter may escape from urban society on the Nahanni Jane, yet he never escapes from the illusion of Hornyak's death, and this event colours all his experience. The Mackenzie is described as a "maze of tangles and channels . . . an epidemic of ponds and lakes and marshes" (Exiles, p. 36). When the river drops, navigation is difficult; and when it freezes, the Mackenzie represents a metaphorical trap for the Nahanni Jane and her crew. Like the doomed crew in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, the crew of the Nahanni Jane recognize the presence of "Life-in-Death" as well as "Life". And their experience changes to perpetual agony. For a narrow channel is navigable but a frozen river is not.

This is a "half-hallucinated" landscape in which illusion causes the dream to become a horrific nightmare.[10] As a powerful antagonist, the Mackenzie represents formless, mindless chaos, and controlling it becomes Peter's responsibility.[11] And the prescription for controlling chaos--how do we define that? In The Studhorse Man, the biographer Demeter is notably unsuccessful at reducing Hazard Lepage's chaotic life to a linear, chronological biography. We can see that in But We Are Exiles Peter is equally unsuccessful. The harshness and formless nature of the landscape are fitting reflections of Peter's own loneliness and confused state of mind. As the novel tells us, "illusion and reality were confounded in a softly shining landscape, the sky upset into its own reflection" (Exiles, p. 30). The landscape is as unpredictable as

Peter himself, for it is a land of mist, fog, and snow, a land where clusters of gravestones may fleetingly appear only to be quickly swallowed up in the drifting smoke of a distant forest fire. On the river the current is fast and eddies twist the Nahanni Jane; there are rocks and white water; sandbars and gravel deposits constantly threaten the lives of the crew. But on shore fire has killed the vegetation, and Peter often recalls Hornyak's death by fire as he senses a "faint unhealthy smell, as of animals caught in the unchecked blaze of the wild fire" (Exiles, p. 27). Trapped by the snow and ice, Peter must proceed through this chaos in an attempt to define it; for as we are told, "the chaos had not yet been resolved into form; men could find no cause for stopping" (Exiles, p. 31). In order to reach Norman Wells he must trust himself to the current, and the current of the river becomes his symbolic prison. Looking into the cold and the frozen rain, he realizes that "the landscape facing off into a grey mist of frozen rain made a giant cage in which he could not grasp the bars to shake them" (Exiles, p. 57). In order to escape from such psychological chaos, he needs to define its limits. But since those limits are those of a dust storm or a plague of locusts, they cannot be accurately defined.

The spirit of Hornyak is present throughout the voyage. As the reflection of Peter's isolation and guilt, Hornyak's ghost is a force from the past which poses a threat to the present.[12] Kroetsch told Donald Cameron that "Hornyak poses a threat to the living,"[13] and we find that he functions as

Peter's alter ego, or as M. L. Ross puts it, his "yearned-for self."[14] He continually appears as a principle, a force, rather than as a credible person, and of course we see him only through Peter's eyes, which are clouded by his own internal miasma of guilt and self-recrimination. Indeed, Hornyak plays a similar role to that of Hazard Lepage in The Studhorse Man; both characters embody an energy, a restlessness, a sexual power unattainable by a timid, introverted narrator. Hornyak's mysterious death by fire and by drowning gives to all rituals in the novel a deeper, more complex meaning. A "young baron of the trade that supplied frozen fish to Chicago and New York" (Exiles, p. 3), he has been able to identify with the northern frontier as Peter is never able to do. Like the frontier itself, he is extravagant in all things; attractive to women, he marries Peter's girl, Kettle, but never reveals his background to her during their six years of marriage. And as Kettle puts it, "he consumed me the way he consumed everything" (Exiles, p. 54). Rootless and opportunistic, Hornyak is the urban man in his conquest of the last frontier:

> And he knew the Eskimo must take it or he would be like Hornyak--the Hornyak he met that summer day on the prairies--Hornyak wheeling bird-free through the dry prairies, a car to drive through the cooling nights, women waiting; lonely women in dry prairie towns, dreaming of an adventure with a stranger who blazes like a comet out of the short luminous night; beer to drink in little hotels where men cool off after the dust and heat of a hard day's work.
> (Exiles, p. 64)

The vitality of Hornyak's presence is such that the crew of the Nahanni Jane cannot escape the knowledge of his death. As Peter tries to contend with the chaos of the Mackenzie river, he recalls Hornyak's advice on the same problem: "We've got some chaos to contend with. So hand me that bottle under your seat" (Exiles, p. 135). And as Peter also recalls, Hornyak had admonished him to "stay young and hang loose" (Exiles, p. 135) as they roared through small prairie towns in a black Rolls-Royce. In the midst of spiritual dessication, Hornyak is an overpowering life force. When his body is found, the crew tries to ignore it but finds they cannot. They view it as a curse, an omen; and Peter is often asked if he killed Hornyak. He is accused of giving Hornyak an unguarded light, knowing that it would electrocute him. Like the albatross in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Hornyak's body is a reminder of guilt and the fugitive condition it produces. For as a castaway and an exile, Peter has tried to deny, to extinguish the vital, life-giving properties that Hornyak represents in this desolate, anti-urban environment.

But We Are Exiles dramatizes an escape from urban civilization. But Peter's continual effort to impose discipline on chaos is essentially the response of modern urban man to the chaos of his own moral situation. After being betrayed by Hornyak and Kettle, after seeing a mirror image of their love affair, he heads north to the apparent simplicity of a frontier life.[15] The son of a widowed father whose law practice has been a failure, Peter believes that he also has no roots in urban civilization. Attracted to the values implicit in his friendship with Hornyak, he views himself as a responsible pilot; as he puts it, "for good or bad, I'm pilot on this tub. I've got to see the thing through" (Exiles, p. 111). Searching for self-definition and yet running from the memory of Hornyak's death, he looks beyond chaos to an ideal state of disciplined order:

> Eleven hundred miles of river in his head; but they were a different eleven hundred miles in spring and fall, in rising or falling water, morning or evening, wind or calm. A man at the wheel and a man in the engine room. Joined by an indicator hand and the jingle of bells. They did not have to hear each other's voices. Here the pilot's eyes and hands were in isolated yet absolute command. Pure. He wanted to shout the word. This is mine. Storm, ice, wind, rock--those can challenge me. But here a man is defined free from the terrors of human relationships. A man's function is so clear that each is simply called chief, skipper, second, pilot.
> (Exiles, pp. 18-19)

Even on the last frontier, Peter cannot resist the urge to classify, to order in his search for the meaning of experience. He wishes to define rather than to explore; his search for Hornyak's vitality is hampered by his urban "tunnel-vision," just as Demeter's vision in The Studhorse Man is hampered by the conventions of biography. And ultimately Peter realizes that he is not re-living Hornyak's experiences or even understanding them; he is merely "playing puppet to a dead king" (Exiles, p. 69).

All characters in the novel share in Peter's sense of loneliness and guilt. After smashing the mirror, Arnafson "sees faces. Drifting in the air or any place. Faces that have no bodies. They accuse him over and over" (Exiles, p. 119). Kettle hears something "like a scream" coming from beneath the water" (Exiles, p. 36). Her own relationship with Hornyak was one of love and hate, and this leads to a sense of anguished guilt. She often asks Peter if he killed Hornyak, and often dreams of Hornyak's ghost; as she explains, "I keep dreaming he's alive and at the same time I know he's dead and there he is alive" (Exiles, p. 110). Her own repeated questions and musings form a haunting monologue, a counterpoint to Peter's own guilt. And she emphasizes the isolation and confusion of the characters in the novel, their exile from urban civilization and from their own perceptions. As a spirit linking the world of the past with that of the present, she links illusion with reality and the dead with those who still live. Indeed as Kroetsch told Donald Cameron, the state of exile dividing illusion and reality is common to us all:

> . . . I'm thinking about our father's land as the world of the dead, of the underground, of the grave. Maybe only the dead can possess the land, make the land the "earth" again. . . . We are caught in a community--involved, I shouldn't say "caught"--it's one of the nicest things about life working both ways. There's a sense in which you could never exile yourself, and maybe that's what you discover after you've been in exile.[16]

THE IDIOM OF ORDINARY SPEECH

When we turn to Kroetsch's second movel, The Words of My Roaring (1966), we find that a quite different technique is used for evoking and understanding personal experience. As M. L. Ross points out, the book marks Kroetsch's progress from "restrained precision" in But We Are Exiles to a more "extravagant style,"[17] and we notice that the lonely, hesitant voice of Peter Guy changes to a vigourous, assertive mode of speech reminding us of Hazard Lepage in The Studhorse Man. Indeed, we might say that where Peter is a Demeter figure, Johnnie Backstrom of The Words of My Roaring is the Lepage antithesis: a lusty, brawling man who seeks to explore experience through reality itself rather than through intellectual analysis. Later in The Studhorse Man, the figures are symbolically combined in the search for the creative power of Poseidon. In The Words of My Roaring, however, we hear primarily the strident voice of Johnnie Backstrom, set within Kroetsch's largely non-chronological, heavily symbolic landscape. As in all Kroetsch's novels, plot is reduced to its bare essentials and seems relatively unimportant.

The narrative technique in The Words of My Roaring is similar to that of other novels by Kroetsch. We see all the novel's events from an eccentric narrator's point of view, and in this case the narrator is Johnnie Backstrom, an energetic undertaker whose colloquialisms frequently tend towards clichés. But this is the idiom of ordinary speech, and is certainly appropriate in the novel's setting, the "apocalyptic landscape" of Alberta during the Depression in the thirties.[18] As Johnnie Backstrom runs for public office, the province is nearing the end of six years of "calamity";[19] unemployment and malnutrition are serious social problems, and dust storms swirl across the arid landscape. Reality in *But We Are Exiles* was snow, ice and wind; here it is day after day of oppressive heat and the promise of no rain. In such a situation, Backstrom must create the illusion that he can offer salvation.

The landscape of the novel is dotted with the worn out implements of twentieth century technology. Backstrom drives around in a battered hearse, and during the course of the novel makes sporadic attempts to obtain another car, an equally decrepit Model A Ford. At a country auction, the artifacts of urban man are displayed for all to see: "bedsteads and mattresses, empty sealers, a butter churn, winter clothes, an old organ, a shoebox full of postcards, extra leaves for a table that didn't seem to be present" (*Words*, p. 78). The source of much of this manufacturing evil is the Eastern city of Toronto, which is "sitting on the water" and "fouling" it with industrial waste (*Words*, p. 37). The only technological device Backstrom actually enjoys using is his radio, an old Atwater-Kent in which he cleverly conceals a bottle of rye. Yet even here he delights in showing how much more vigorous he is than transmitted speech; in one scene, he places the Atwater-Kent in the sacred space usually reserved for the coffin and, by having an extended conversation with it, shows that the radio is a poor speaker indeed.

In his second novel, Kroetsch takes the Hornyak figure and recreates him as the narrator, Johnnie Backstrom.[20] As several critics have noticed, Backstrom bears a resemblance to several other well known "anti-heroes" whose vigour and innocence have a comic dimension: Holden Caulfield, Duddy Kravitz, and Gully Jimson.[21] But Backstrom is a more complex figure than these. An undertaker by profession, he campaigns from his hearse and schedules political meetings in his funeral parlour. Women are interested in him, and actually mob him on one occasion, but he assumes this is because he is an undertaker who must dress in black. And he is well aware that his profession implies an interest in death rather than in life; as he puts it, "silence is my business, I deal in silence; and its prologue, sorrow. Sorrow and grief" (Words, p. 23). For a man who is more interested in affirming the vigour of life than in celebrating a mass for the dead, the occupation of undertaker is certainly an ironic one.

There is a necessary contrast in the novel between Backstrom's presumed sobriety as an undertaker and the extravagance that is the basis of his experience. Although he always dresses in black, his extreme height and unkempt appearance make him look like a "preacher in hell" (Words, p. 4). "A man consumed by high passions, pretty well hung, and famed as a heller with women" (Words, p. 4), he drinks heavily and in fact gets drunk at his own wedding reception. Ironically, his own life exists as the direct result of deaths of others. Only a funeral can save him financially. Like Hazard Lepage of The Studhorse Man, he is a man of basic, elemental passions, a man whose spiritual and physical actions can scarcely be controlled. When he stops to urinate by the side of the road, he views the act as a heroic one: "For that one beautiful moment you feel you've spent a lifetime looking for a place to pee, and here you've found it" (Words, p. 16). And on another occasion, when he is standing in church, his thoughts focus not on the ceremony but on his own lust for existence:

> But a bell was ringing. A bell rang, a bell saying, gross, gross, gross. Three little sounds that dinned in my head. Dinned and roared. The old din and roar again.
>
> Gross, gross. My appetites. My longings. My dreams. My deceptions. My fantasies. My bottomless gullet. My grasping huge fists. My insatiable hunger not just for something but for everything. Gross unto death. (Words, p. 146)

In Saul Bellow's novel Henderson the Rain King, the narrator Henderson, a millionaire, leaves for Africa because a small voice inside him keeps repeating "I want, I want."[22] He too is a man of gigantic size and shocking aspect, and he too wishes to bring rain to an impoverished people. Aware of the magnitude of his own vitality and need for elemental experience, Henderson must exile himself from urban North America just as Backstrom must take refuge in the wasteland society of the prairies during the Depression. They are both urban men driven by the need for more than urban experience can offer. And they both become epic, almost legendary figures, for their implied struggles and contradictions are shown as considerably larger than life.

Backstrom is well aware of his own human tendency to simplify, to reduce chaos by ignoring its irrational nature. He often remembers his triumph as a pitcher for the Notikeewin baseball team, when he "fanned twenty-seven men in a row" in his first game (Words, p. 11). But as he well knows, life itself is not exactly a baseball game. Although he was his mother's "first born" (Words, p. 22) and may regard himself as an Adamic prototype, his middle name is "Judas" and he himself finds forgiveness "intolerable" (Words, p. 61). His grotesque physique makes him think of himself as a beast, a monster; yet he cannot resist the innocent and the beautiful, though he feels the urge to destroy it:

> I hated her innocence.
>
> I hated her goddamned innocence. She had no idea what a brute animal man can be.
>
> My misery was complete. I am absolutely fascinated by innocence. I felt I should make a clean breast of it, just spread out my giant hands and say, look, don't trust me like that. Men quarrel. And I am a ravening lusting beast. I cannot resist beauty and innocence. I cannot sustain the hungering of my own flesh. I must foul and stain beauty wherever I find it, I must corrupt and destroy. (Words, p. 63)

The contradictions in Backstrom are those of contemporary urban man. Torn between beauty and evil, love and hate, sobriety and celebration, modern man often forms solutions that make him appear ridiculous. And so when Backstrom muses upon sex, he wonders if sex is worth spending seventy years "sniffing and pawing, crawling and begging and imploring, conniving, cheating, betraying your wife, inventing filthy lies, wasting your money, missing sleep, deceiving your best friends, risking the creation of further ridiculous life, wrecking your clothes" (Words, p. 157). In order to please others, we play the clown; as Backstrom puts it, "we're kicking up our heels, showing our spirits. Make the bastards laugh. Make them giggle and grin" (Words, p. 127)

A world of rapidly shifting technologies produces extreme confusion in individual morality. As Backstrom points out, "we confuse beginnings, endings. They are so alike so often" (Words, p. 7). We may ask about the nature of sin and we may enquire about the mortality of man, but there are no definite answers. With each introduction of a new technological innovation, new moral problems arise which are difficult to solve. At times Backstrom celebrates to drown out the pressure of unanswerable philosophical questions, and at other times he feels compelled to be pessimistic. Yet the questions he explores are basic ones, and his own vigorous expression of identity raises them more effectively than most intellectual approaches could do. Because of society's conditioning he feels "obliged to be guilty" in his affair with Helen Murdoch (Words, p. 159); and yet he can question the very basis of guilt itself:

> Sinner be damned, who was a sinner? Was the water guilty that drowned Jonah? Was the wind guilty; the wind that turned the fields to dust? Was the sun guilty? Why should I answer questions? When did I get to ask questions? The sickle be damned and the reaper be damned. Who was the judge in the first place? A man is free. Each man is free. And I wouldn't be pushed and shoved and stepped on. I have my rights. (Words, p. 86)

As we might expect, Backstrom is impatient with any sort of organized religion. He can quote freely from the

Bible and is willing to admit "it's pretty good" (Words, p. 34), but he hates sermons and prayers. While at the funeral of his friend Jonah Bledd, he decides that rather than praying he should "let it rage, let it roar" (Words, p. 143). Instead of listening to the sermon at Jonah's funeral, he composes a sermon of his own on death in which he points out that "one good man is forced to die by a conspiracy of greed and selfishness, by the betrayals of his dearest friends, by the connivings of the constipated rich, by the collaborations of the deceived poor" (Words, p. 146). Since religion cannot offer solutions to man's problems, it has only one use for Backstrom: to nourish the political party headed by the fundamentalist John George Applecart, who will gladly attend his political rallies, distribute hundreds of free pamphlets, and presumably help him get elected.

Kroetsch's technique of defining by reflection, used so revealingly in But We Are Exiles, is further developed in The Words of My Roaring. Backstrom's opponent in the election, Doc Murdoch, is the doctor who delivered him, and ironically it is to Doc that Backstrom goes running whenever he is in trouble. We recall that Backstrom originally wished to be a doctor; but Doc suggested he should take up the profession of undertaker. With his political clichés and his "golden smile" (Words, p. 4), Doc exudes serenity, dependability, where Backstrom exudes only an attempt to master chaos. What Doc touches lives and thrives: his garden is lush and green while

Backstrom's is a mixture of two hundred unwanted squash and dead tomatoes, cucumbers, and cabbages (Words, p. 158). Backstrom has an affair with Doc's beautiful daughter Helen, who provides a sharp contrast to his own nagging wife Elaine. And in fact Doc is responsible for the care of Elaine herself when she is pregnant.

Backstrom is well aware that Doc's business is the preserving of life while his own is the preservation of life in death. As he points out, Doc helps people come into the world, but he helps them out (Words, p. 36). Yet Doc's very stability leads him into moral condemnation of Jonah Bledd, Backstrom's best friend, when it is suggested that perhaps Jonah committed suicide. According to Doc, this shows that Jonah "couldn't take it" (Words, p. 151), that he was not equal to the responsibility of a wife and children. But Backstrom knows that Jonah's death actually symbolizes a moral triumph over the values represented by Doc Murdoch. For Jonah is a complex figure exemplifying the contradictions in the relationship between Backstrom and Doc. A true family man like Doc, Jonah is nevertheless a "dreamer" of "reckless optimism" (Words, p. 53). At his funeral he is described as "a model among men. A model for men" (Words, p. 141). His death by drowning recalls for us the death of Hornyak in But We Are Exiles, a death which is central to the development of a narrator's character.

Backstrom feels guilty about Jonah's death, since Jonah broke his arm in a car accident involving the hearse and hence could not swim. He knows that Jonah was basically a good man, though he was contented while Backstrom can never be. Although Doc views Jonah's drowning as a "cowardly" suicide (Words, p. 72), Backstrom secretly views the drowning as a victory over Doc himself. For he alone knows the lake is bottomless, that Jonah's body will never be found. Those who dream, those who aspire to greater things--these men cannot be contained, even in death. They are no fit subjects for an undertaker's grim ministrations. And so in death Jonah substitutes for Backstrom, just as he had substituted for the undertaker in a job they had once both applied for on the railway. Like Peter Guy in But We Are Exiles and Professor Madham in Gone Indian, Jonah is a figure who implies a relationship of contradictions. Paradox and word play are basic to Kroetsch's fiction, and such characters are catalysts who explore shifting levels of symbolic meaning.

The opposition between Backstrom's need for security and his creative drive is symbolized by the two women in his life. His wife, Elaine, is a typical middle class woman who buys from the Rawleigh man and is proud of her matching pillow cases, HIS and HERS (Words, p. 18). A teetotaler of statistical mind, she is "small and sharp-tongued" (Words, p. 30), and frequently lists Backstrom's sins to him. Forgetting that she has what Backstrom calls a "goddamned aluminum junkyard" in her hair (Words, p. 30), she is critical of the smashed headlight and broken fender which make the hearse into a sort of junk heap itself.

Her counterpoint in the novel is the beautiful Helen Murdoch, who understands that Backstrom may well be subconsciously trying to create new business for himself by smashing up the hearse. Helen understands that Backstrom must "keep meeting death" (Words, p. 60), that he needs to define experience in his own terms. And their love affair--appropriately set in her father's fertile garden--represents Backstrom's immersion in the destructive element and his symbolic rebirth:

> Six long strides that sprang from my longing: into the middle of the Doc's sunken pool. In I marched, going full bore, stopping for nothing. The pebbles be damned, the goldfish be damned.
>
> Helen did not answer the ringing phone. She followed. Helen followed, splashing me just a little, but her mouth was suddenly warm on mine; and together there in the water we fumbled in our silent haste. I have heard that certain acts are impossible under water, but that was not the case with us. Red hot blades are plunged hissing into water to temper the steel. A bard had sung in the darkness. The plum tree itself was a blue flame. And there in the darkness we coupled, damned near drowning, I might add; we coupled, me like a hippopotamus; we met and were joined, the stars wheeling, the night hushed into admiration; we coupled and were one, Helen and I, my asphodel afloat on the sloshing waves.
>
> (Words, pp. 166-167)

In this scene, the water represents a baptism, a new revitalization of Backstrom's creative life force. And the symbol of rain is used throughout the book to suggest every man's need for such spiritual fulfilment. As W. H. New points out, the rain marks a shift from the "old chaos" to a fluid "change" for Backstrom.[23] In the dust of the Depression, the promise of rain is the promise of new life. And Backstrom has used this as the ultimate election promise: he has told the electors that it will rain before the election. He is encouraged by the sayings of a local prophet, " a little heap of rags" who resembles a "human dust storm" (Words, p. 79); the prophet tells him that it will rain, though the world will end soon after. The vision of rain, of creation, inspires Backstrom in his search for a new life force. He recalls the fertile East as the home of "water--so much water in the air and grass and ponds and brooks, it blurred the whole world a blue-green; and the old snake fences that spoke of tremendous forests; and sausage makers and cheese makers and creameries in all the dozens of little towns, turning out good food, absolutely delicious food" (Words, p. 58). As he puts it, this is "the green lush old Eden" (Words, p. 58). Yet this Eden is also dangerous; like Backstrom himself, it contains suggestions of destruction. In one of his dreams, he sees the rain become a deluge and wash away the landscape which it should give life to:

> By God, I dreamt that it poured rain. Endlessly. It got started and wouldn't stop. It was terrible. The crops started to rust. You could see the rust at the bottom of the stalks, and you could find it in the heads of wheat and barley, the heads appearing, finally, but no kernels in them. Hulls and no kernels. You looked at a field and you could see whole patches that were rust coloured--dying from rain. Then the soil wouldn't soak up any more water and the crops began to turn yellow and drown in the low spots. Flooded out.
>
> (Words, p. 98)

When it finally rains "by the barrelful" (Words, p. 197), just as Backstrom had predicted, his election promise is fulfilled. For the rain is indeed a deluge; as he puts it, "the air we breathed was suffocating, it was so full of water. You needed gills. You could drown standing up on a raft" (Words, p. 197). The townspeople thank him for bringing the rain, but Backstrom realizes that to accept their thanks is to become a fraud. He confesses to Helen that the rain is a "natural phenomenon" (Words, p. 206), that he is not a god, and refuses to "cash in on an accident" (Words, p. 193). Ultimately his victory is ironic, for in seeing rain come to the parched landscape he loses his own capacity to take credit for it. The smaller ironies in the book support the rain as the symbol of a larger irony. The undertaker's hat passed freely around for election contributions is a symbol of life, of freedom through political transformation; but a local clown with whom Backstrom identifies strongly is killed by a bull, a symbol of sexual and creative union between Backstrom and Helen. Modern life is defined by paradox, by contradiction; as Backstrom asks, "does every move in the right direction have to be a total loss?" (Words, p. 92). Living in the modern age means defining the self through irony, through paradox; life means accepting "the contradiction that is man; the mind that wrestles with black despair, the spirit that soars" (Words, p. 31).

Backstrom has tried to speak the truth. Unlike his opponent Doc Murdoch, he has no facile election promises to assauge his detractors. He has only one absurd, gargantuan promise, eventually fulfilled but then rejected by he who originally promised it. The consumer becomes the consumed, as in Atwood's The Edible Woman; as Backstrom puts it, "I consume and I consume. Chapter and verse. Newspaper columns that bulge with advice. The want ads. Food. Hats. Socks. Gasoline. Women. Beer. Hardstuff" (Words, p. 95). Beginnings and endings conflict, interact; man tries to speak the truth, but ends by playing the part of a clown. Indeed, in the modern age "sometimes it seems that chaos is the only order. The only real order" (Words, p. 101). Life cannot be restricted to Backstrom's baseball game or to Demeter's biography of Hazard Lepage in The Studhorse Man, for it eludes patterns imposed from outside. All man can do is to learn to speak the truth.

FROM THE PRINT MEDIUM TO TAPE RECORDINGS

Johnnie Backstrom of The Words of My Roaring is well aware of the human tendency to simplify, to reduce the chaos of life to a comprehensible form. In The Studhorse Man (1969), Kroetsch explores this issue further: a narrator tries to reduce experience to the printed form of the standard chronological biography. The medium of print is used exactly as the tape medium is used in Gone Indian, for in both books a narrator is caught by the limitations the medium imposes upon him. The flexibility of Jeremy's tape recordings in Gone Indian allows Professor Madham to edit them, but the chronological, sequential form of a biography has exactly the opposite effect and actually traps Demeter as he tries to capture the life of his rival, Hazard Lepage. While the real Jeremy Sadness often disappears behind the urbane facade of Professor Madham, the real Demeter is paralysed because he cannot transcribe Hazard's experiences on paper. Both books explore the uses of different media in man's attempt to communicate the value of personal experience.

M. L. Ross has noted that The Studhorse Man represents a "crucial juncture" as Kroetsch tries to capture the essence of prairie experience through the use of language. Indeed, language gives Kroetsch a key to the chaos of human experience.[24] Through the use of burlesque, mock epic, and literary parody, Kroetsch tries to resolve the tension between that which is experienced and the consciousness that experiences it.[25] Several critics have noticed the classical parallels in the novel, and it has been suggested that the novel is a "freewheeling adaptation" of Homer's Odyssey in which Hazard plays the part of Ulysses.[26] Although it is true that the book adapts the conventions of the quest for its own purposes, the main importance of the novel in my study is as an exploration of the book as artifact, as a printed record of experience. Demeter is a biographer because Kroetsch perceives this limitation as one of the chief ingredients of the new sensibility.

The biographer must view the object of his study, and must carefully select the relevant details of a life. He cannot transcribe every detail of a life nor can he be certain that the details he does select are the important ones. If he selects as many details as possible his book will be lifeless, boring; such a book is Carlos Baker's meticulously documented biography, Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story. In this book, transcribed almost entirely from Hemingway's unpublished letters, the figure of Hemingway hardly seems to exist. But if the biographer takes the opposite approach and attempts to enter imaginatively into a character's life without dwelling inordinately on detail, the biography may be highly romanticized; indeed, the biographer may be said to have fallen in love with his creation. Such a book is Philip Lindsay's idiosyncratic The Haunted Man: A Portrait of Edgar Allan Poe. Poe certainly comes to life in this biography, which at times resembles a novel, but is this the real Poe or Lindsay's idea of Poe? Indeed, many times a biography reveals more about its author than its subject, and usually a biographer works on the life of a particular subject because he has affinities with him. James Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson is interesting partly because the two men were friends and had much in common, and the biography has a sincerity which reflects their symbiotic relationship. Moreover, in his biography of Samuel Johnson, the famous biographer, Boswell avoids romanticizing his subject, and the details he gives us are always appropriate. His enthusiasm for the subject is tempered with an aesthetic distance that allows him to judge as well as to appreciate.

In the twentieth century world of mass information, mass media, and advertising, this necessary balance becomes more difficult to attain than it might have been in Boswell's time. For the biographer has simply much more information at his disposal. Hence his task of selecting appropriate information becomes more complex. Indeed, Demeter's world in The Studhorse Man is a technological junk pile. His subject, the notorious studhorse man Hazard Lepage, is obsessed with junk--"scrap iron, rags, bones, and miscellaneous"--and stays alive by gathering stray bones and beer bottles.[27] Hazard's environment is one of furnace rooms, telegraph keys, and bridges such as the High Level Bridge in Edmonton. He leads his horse, Poseidon, by a rein made from a "broken set of snow chains" (Studhorse Man, p. 61). And his personal home environment is an amazing collection of every sort of unused technological device:

> Sitting, he could not help but confront the chaos on the bookshelves beside the desk: curry-combs, a broken hamstrap, a spoon wired to a stick for dropping poisoned wheat into the holes of offending gophers, saltpeter, gentian root, a scattering of copper rivets, black antimony, a schoolboy's ruler, three mousetraps in a matchbox, two chisels for trimming hoofs, Cornucrescine (for making horn grow), ginger, horse liniment and liniment for his back, Ellman's Royal Embrocation, blue vitriol, an electuary, nux vomica, saddle soap in a Spode (a simple blue and white saucer, Spanish fly--
> (Studhorse Man, p.10)

As in all Kroetsch's novels, the landscape is unwelcome, forbidding. It is wartime, and the Alberta government is searching for bones; one advertisement reads "BRING IN YOUR BONES WE PAY CASH" (Studhorse Man, p. 8). At one point, we are told, "the sky began to rain bones. It was impossible to know who was on whose side" (Studhorse Man, p. 16). The object of Hazard's search is a perfect mare for his perfect stallion, Poseidon; but the object of Demeter's is to take the details, the "bones" of Hazard's life, and to reconstruct these and form the life of a human being. The "bones" of past events, past lives and former deaths are pieces of Hazard's life, which must be assembled like a jigsaw puzzle by the biographer; the "very beast dismantled" must be put back together again (Studhorse Man, p. 22).

And just as the book is Hazard's quest for a mare, so it is Demeter's quest for Hazard himself. As W. H. New points out, this is really the difference between Hazard's "spiritual impulse" and Demeter's "artificial fabrication"; both impulse and artifice create myth, but the myth-maker who must create from detail has problems.[28] Hazard's vitality is balanced against Demeter's passion for detail. We know that Hazard has been wandering for twenty-four years, leading Poseidon from farm to farm in search of the perfect mare, and he is actually a sort of mythic Western frontier hero who is a difficult subject for a biography. It is, after all, extremely difficult to write a good biography of a figure whose exploits are already legendary. The biographer is a myth-maker, but he is also a myth-destroyer. For Hazard himself, the quest is simply the necessity for survival; as the novel tells us, "he was a truly desperate man. Extinction or survival was quite simply to be the fate of the breed of horse he alone had preserved through six generations" (Studhorse Man, p. 8). As he wanders from place to place in his wish to breed the "perfect horse" (Studhorse Man, p. 20), he looks for reference to the Encyclopedia Britannica and to the General

Stud Book, a set of leather-bound volumes which form, we are told, "Hazard's history of man and his theology" (*Studhorse Man*, p. 10). He retreats into his bizarre mansion and pores over breeding lists; he becomes an authority on the attributes of the perfect mare. Every time Poseidon is used as a stud Hazard pockets three dollars, which he uses to help maintain his quest.

But Hazard's attempt to satisfy the creative force symbolized by Poseidon is a difficult subject for his faithful biographer. Instead of finding art through artifice, as Demeter does, Hazard sees art in living flesh.[29] "A man of inordinate lust" (*Studhorse Man*, p. 30), Hazard consumes women as he consumes food and alcohol. Like Michael Hornyak of *But We Are Exiles* and Johnnie Backstrom of *The Words of My Roaring*, Hazard is a man of extravagant tastes. When Demeter first sees Hazard at a bridal reception, he notices that his subject is consuming huge quantities of food and drink. "In the midst of all that extravagance," Demeter complains, "I could only nibble at a shimmering jellied salad on one corner of my heaped plate" (*Studhorse Man*, p. 98). In fact, as Demeter later discovers, Hazard is behaving just as his family's motto suggests:

> I have investigated various sources that might lead me to an understanding of that man and the brine from which, some would argue, we all issued; puzzling as it is, my sources indicate that the Lepages were a Rimouski family. Their seigneury was established on the shores of the St. Lawrence in 1660; their coat of arms consists of a black eagle on a silver shield: "*Un écu blanc (argent) portant en son milieu un aigle noir (sable) dont les*

> *griffes, le bec et les éperons sont rouges (gueules)*." Further, one branch of the family has added the motto in English: NOTHING IN MODERATION. All indications are that the Lepages of Rimouski were great dreamers about the future: *cette mauvaise habitude qui sépare les Francaise des Anglais.*
> (*Studhorse Man*, p. 117)

Demeter's attempt to write a biography of such a man is actually an attempt to reduce irrationality to a rational form. He must explore Hazard's absurd adventures and dreams, and these do not usually yield to rational analysis. And as he describes Hazard, he becomes confused. When Hazard makes love to Marie Eshpeter, they both look like horses to Demeter. The mania for horses which nurtures Hazard's thirteen year engagement to Martha Proudfoot, owner of "five of the finest Arab mares in this part of the world" (*Studhorse Man*, p. 47), begins to affect Demeter as well.

No biographer, of course, can interpret dreams, especially dreams that are as bizarre as those of Hazard Lepage. If the biographer becomes a myth-maker, does he deal in "apparent reality" or in the "creating of reality"?[30] If Hazard dresses as an RCMP constable and appears so in his biography, does he then become an RCMP constable? Only the biographer really knows, and he must constantly interpret, reconstruct. Sitting in his bathtub, surrounded by papers and notes, Demeter can see only a mirror image of reality: "A mirror is so placed above my sink that I have been able to sit for hours, attempting to imagine what in fact did happen (allowing for the reversal of the image) exactly where I imagine it. It is then *time* I must reconstruct, not space" (Studhorse Man, p. 83). The Demeter-Hazard relationship is similar to the Professor Madham-Jeremy Sadness one in Gone Indian; in both cases a technological medium proves inadequate in capturing man's experience. As Kroetsch told Donald Cameron, a biography cannot recreate a man's life:

> I'm doing a parody of biography, because if you think about undertaking to capture another man's life, that's a pretty fantastic notion--and yet you do capture something. So it's working both ways, in the parody and in the sharp contrast between the two men, the one completely static, the other the roving dream figure.[31]

Demeter is not a totally sympathetic biographer, however, for he is Hazard's sexual rival, just as Professor Madham is Jeremy's rival in Gone Indian. And both Demeter and Hazard can well be considered projections of the same personality.[32] In the seventeenth century, the metaphysical poets were expert at debating philosophical problems through the projection of several opposed personalities. Once a youthful companion of Martha Proudfoot's, Demeter envies Hazard his sexual potency and plays the role of voyeur during Hazard's sexual marathons. At the novel's end, we recall, Demeter is supremely happy when he himself becomes the studhorse man; as he puts it, "my energy was boundless, my confidence supreme" (Studhorse Man, p. 158). Like a studhorse himself, he is finally "in the prime of condition" (Studhorse Man, p. 158).

Demeter's assumption of the role of studhorse man implies a rejection of his previous interest in biography.

It is now he who will save the Lepage horses from extinction. Before this sudden shift, however, he is a dull, tedious priest to Hazard's colourful confession. He likes to believe that he and Hazard are "alike in strenuously resisting that distortion of facts by which men delude themselves" (Studhorse Man, p. 77). But he is still a man of facts, a historian, while Hazard is a man of action. Hazard denies the past and prefers life in the present; Demeter thrives on assembling "fragments" in a vain attempt to capture "a whole image of the vanished past" (Studhorse Man, p. 33). Hence his notes, carefully taken on three by five cards, mean nothing until they are interpreted for "invisible meanings" (Studhorse Man, p. 18). He must be both relevant and accurate, and much of the detail he recalls is simply irrelevant. And finally he realizes the basic question he cannot answer: is the truth in Hazard himself, or in his biography?

As he writes Hazard's biography, Demeter gradually comes to reject the conventions of the usual chronological biography. He finds that when a book is written about a person, it immediately turns events in the immediate present into events frozen by print into the past. There is no simultaneity to the medium of print. The ideal biographer who uses print as a medium is "a person afflicted with sanity. He is a man who must first of all be sound of mind, and in the clarity of his own vision he must ride out the dark night, ride on while all about him falls into chaos" (Studhorse Man, pp. 146-147). But the lessons of history are not necessarily chronological: they are cyclic and recur many times. History is more than a dull record of facts; it is a living organism which links the past, present, and future. Our perception is not limited to a single point of view, and is rather a state of multiple awareness or multi-consciousness. Demeter is unable to produce his "ordered world" in either biography or life (Studhorse Man, p. 59), and admits his madness is appropriate in a world of multiple perspectives and dislocations. The biography that is a true work of art will be produced by recurrence and repetition rather than by accumulation of facts:

> The very process of recurrence is what enables us to learn, to improve, to correct past errors, to understand the present, to guide the generations that are to come. Yet it is precisely this same characteristic of life that makes life unendurable. Men of more experience than I have lamented at the repetitious nature of the ultimate creative act itself. It is only by a mastery of the process of repetition (you will note the repeated "e", and "t" and the "i," and the "tit" standing out boldly in the middle") that we can learn to endure; yet we can only master the process by a lifetime of repetition. . . . The path that would appear to lead to madness is surely the highroad to art.
>
> (Studhorse Man, p. 124)

The object of Hazard's quest, Poseidon, is a symbol both of history and of creative vitality in the present. Indeed, Poseidon is the creative principle in art that can unify the past and present. Chinese artists, we are told, "drew their horses true to life, true to the rhythm of life" (Studhorse Man, p. 130). Poseidon himself may well be a descendant of "those great stallions that shaped England's history for two and a half centuries" (Studhorse Man, p. 136). We are given Poseidon's distinguished genealogy, and we are constantly reminded of his uncontrollable power. As Kroetsch told Donald Cameron, the symbol of the horse has "power, it's beautiful, it's creative, it's dangerous. It represents the unconscious in certain ways, because of its relationship to freedom."[33] Opposed to the rationalism of city life and its empty rituals, Poseidon helps Demeter free himself from the technological debris surrounding him. Ironically, it is Demeter who then becomes the studhorse man; he supervises the use of Poseidon as a stud in the production of Pregnant Mare's Urine, a fluid from which estrogen, the main ingredient of a new birth control pill, is extracted. Poseidon's sexual activities thus eventually produce a substance which may help to control the forthcoming population explosion.

THE NEW SENSIBILITY IMPLIES A REJECTION OF THE ACADEMIC STANCE

In The Studhorse Man the narrator, Demeter, attempted to take the experiences of one man's life and impose upon them the form of a conventional biography. Kroetsch's last novel, Gone Indian (1973) is also a search for form; but the entire search is seen through a different medium--a tape recorder which the narrator Jeremy Sadness takes with him everywhere. Gone Indian is the most complicated novel Kroetsch has written, and it is a fitting sequel to The Studhorse Man. The use and impact of new technologies are explored and questioned; in both novels, the narrator is a man who can relate only to the new electronic technology. Demeter could not seem to write a biography, we recall, and Jeremy is equally inept at writing his dissertation. As Russell M. Brown points out, Gone Indian itself went through several title changes. Originally the novel was called Funeral Games, reminding us of Book V of the Aeneid, in which the funeral games celebrated for Anchises mark the passing of the old Trojan order and the emergence of a new Roman world. Then it became Falling, a suggestion of Jeremy's own failure and fall in the urban environment, and finally Gone Indian, a title recalling urban man's romanticizing of the supposedly Edenic world of the North American Indian.[34] And the title also suggests a pun on the word "gone": Jeremy Sadness turns and is "gone" into another culture, an anti-urban environment that is "gone" or extinct.

Gone Indian is the concluding novel of Kroetsch's "Out West" trilogy, a series that began, we remember, with The Words of My Roaring. Each novel of the trilogy examines the passing of an era and explores the myths a particular culture claims as its own.[35] Like Kroetsch's other novels, Gone Indian is a quest for a narrator's identity, and the form of that quest defines the narrator's cultural ethos. As in But We Are Exiles, this narrator is retreating from the technological, urban society and its competitive work ethic; both Peter Guy and Jeremy Sadness explore experience in environments where order does not appear to exist.

Gone Indian also makes one further step by Kroetsch away from realism towards a heavily symbolic, multi-levelled narrative technique. He told Donald Cameron that he believes realism is basically a "convention":

> I'm fascinated right now by the effects of moving away from realism--the kinds of freedom you get, and the kinds of truth you get at, by departing from the sterner varieties of realism. I'm not so sure anyone has a "realistic" experience; it's a literary convention to begin with, the notion of realism. We all get a false sense of communion out of that convention. . . . Each traveller has his own subjective response to the experience of travel, his own anxieties, his own sense of the significance of colour and space--and space fascinates me right now. I'm taking a character out of the city and into a new sense of space and having him confront it.[36]

The novel is less a novel than a multi-media happening. It is a collection of tape recordings sent by an unemployed American graduate student, Jeremy Sadness, to his supervisor, Professor R. Mark Madham, who then plays the tapes and offers comments on them. This structure permits Kroetsch to manipulate the time sequence so that he can offer us miscellaneous events, which can be played back at various times. As in But We Are Exiles, a technological symbol allows Kroetsch to explore the meshing of fact and fantasy, reality and illusion. Or as Jeremy aptly expresses it on one occasion, he has disguised himself as himself.[37] The novel is informed by a series of reflections and disguises. If Jeremy disguises himself as himself, we may well ask, what exactly is he trying to hide? Is the mysterious Professor Madham a facet of Jeremy's own personality? Is it important that the name "Madham" appears to be a combination of the words "madman" and "madam"? When Jeremy first sees Notikeewin, he notices a mirage at the same time. His own suitcase has disappeared, and the one he is carrying belongs to a mysterious Roger Dorck, the official Winter King of the Notikeewin Winter Carnival. On his arrival at the Edmonton International Airport, Jeremy is met by a beautiful blonde who proceeds to remove her "tattered mink coat," a "tattered red sweatshirt," her "snowboots," a "patriotic plaid skirt" and, finally, her "tits" (Gone Indian, p. 8). This person, it appears, claims to have been a buffalo in a previous existence. No wonder poor Jeremy himself asks for the patience of a buffalo, and correctly notes that "illusion is rife" (Gone Indian, p. 8).

The novel explores this question of man's perception in the face of reality and illusion. At one point Jeremy is arrested by fake RCMP officers and thrown into a fake jail. He is then dressed as an Indian and is, we might say, a fake Indian. And of course we do not know exactly how accurate are Professor Madham's transcripts of Jeremy's tapes. He himself is having an affair with Jeremy's wife, Carol, and can hardly be said to be unbiased. As Jeremy tells Professor Madham in an aside, "how ironic: you do nothing, I do everything: we arrive at the same predicament" (Gone Indian, p. 56). And once Professor Madham has listened to the tapes and has erased them, the record has been destroyed. We actually only see Jeremy as Professor Madham wants us to see him, for Jeremy himself has jumped off a bridge, leaving his precious tape recorder hanging from a protruding timber.

Although he is afraid of the northern wilderness, Jeremy feels obligated to journey to the last frontier to see what he can find. The young American goes west to the frontier and then north to "Edmonton THE Gateway" (Gone Indian, p. 53), for in this novel the development of the Canadian North-West symbolically represents twentieth century social change.[38] As Kroetsch told Donald Cameron, "young Americans are seeing in Canada . . . the sense of space, the sense of freedom, the sense of authentic experience, even that they believe they can no longer get here in the East."[39] The "bleak and haunted landscape" of the prairies in winter becomes Jeremy's "interior landscape" (Gone Indian, p. 13); much opposed to urban technology, he dreams of the "scalping of Edmonton" (Gone Indian, p. 103), and envisions the city's destruction:

> Department stores gave up their treasures to crackling flames: banks bubbled and burst like cauldrons of molten money. Churches fell in on their weeping worshippers. High-rise apartments and their occupants, fused at last into a community of soul, smoked like wildcat gushers into the darkening sky. Lovers ran arm in arm from their cheap hotels, perishing together in speaking tongues of fire.
> (Gone Indian, p. 104)

Jeremy's own perception is warped by the conditioning he has received during nine years of graduate school. He feels compelled to visit the University of Alberta while he is in Edmonton, but the campus has an air of unreality:

faculty members are shouting at each other in the faculty club, and all the students in the cafeteria are asleep. Indeed, as he moves through Edmonton, he finds that the city itself is a huge junk pile of technological debris. Lost without his Samsonite suitcase, which contains his beloved "grip developer," sweater, socks and a few chewed pencils (Gone Indian, p. 21), Jeremy complains that he is "marooned for want of a Gillette Blue Blade" (Gone Indian, p. 19). Hence he quickly fortifies himself with a toothbrush, shaving set, and a "deodorant that is guaranteed to seal the body against disintegration" (Gone Indian, p. 24). But he still finds the Edmonton Airport confusing and the city intolerable. "Out of his suitcase, you are creating him" (Gone Indian, p. 20), we are told, for Jeremy is known for what he leaves behind.

Jeremy's universe is defined by broken artifacts of the mechanical age. He always carries a vast number of unnecessary keys, and is prone to see in terms of mechanical stereotypes. When he cannot understand something, he retreats to these symbols. The three identical princesses at the Notikeewin Winter Carnival might be "Xerox copies" (Gone Indian, p. 112), he realizes, and when he cannot decide which one to crown as the queen, he claims to be a camera: "I was trapped into my own light focus on that which zoomed in, retreated" (Gone Indian, p. 113). He notices that the bedroom at the Sunderman house contains a vast number of clocks, all of which have stopped. The travelling in the novel occurs in symbols of modern technology: trains, cars, and snowmobiles. Significantly, the railway track Jeremy ultimately follows to his death proves to be merely an antidote, a corrective to the "space of his own drowning" (Gone Indian, p. 154) in which he is so totally lost.

But the technological device that is most important in the novel is the tape recorder itself, which almost becomes a character in its own right. This device allows Jeremy to record not only his notes and feelings, but also his asides, phone calls, and miscellaneous observations. The tape recorder also allows transcriptions of ordinary speech, as in Jeremy's phone call to Professor Balding, Chairman of the English Department at the University of Alberta: "Balding? . . . Oh hello Mr. Balding. This is . . . this . . . Sadness. . . . Yes, Jeremy Sadness. . . . No. no. I'm calling from New York" (Gone Indian, p. 50). The tape recorder is, we recall, found dangling from a timber in the middle of the Kelchamoot Bridge after Jeremy and Jill Sunderman have jumped to avoid a train which is "off schedule" and on a track "it was not supposed to be on" (Gone Indian, p. 153). The recorder is Jeremy's most prized possession and his only real link with the outside world.

Professor Madham's problem in editing the tapes is, he claims, the overwhelming detail. The Professor's original suggestion is that Jeremy take the tape recorder with him to help him finish his dissertation. Since Jeremy is unable to write his dissertation, this idea seems logical enough. Jeremy will mail cassettes back to Professor Madham, who will then edit them into a presentable form. But problems arise when Jeremy finds that the tape recorder provides his only link with the real world. Instead of sending the cassettes to Professor Madham, he wants to hear his own voice for reassurance. On many of the tapes, he insults the university traditions of which Professor Madham is so proud. "I needed my tape recorder; given a microphone I could have spoken" (Gone Indian, p. 79), he says at one point, and he comes to treat the tape recorder as a trusty weapon, often drawing the microphone as if it were a six-gun. He even uses the microphone to masturbate; and when he wants to test himself, he tests the tape recorder:

> Where he had expected to find his suitcase, he found instead his tape recorder.
>
> Consequence: he seized the recorder in his shaking hands. He jerked the microphone out of its leatherette pouch. He pushed the plastic buttons, listened for the first whisper of the turning tape:
>
> TESTING, TESTING ONE TWO, TESTING THREE FOUR FIVE SIX SEVEN EIGHT NINE
>
> He talks. He jumps to his feet and falls down on the floor on his toes and fingers and one UP two UP three UP four UP five. He talks some more.
>
> (Gone Indian, p. 125)

Jeremy is a typical North American city dweller. A "child of Manhattan" who has "dreamed Northwest" ever since he was very young (Gone Indian, p. 6), he regards himself as "a poor city boy set down by blundering jet among the wicked and the rebellious of the vanished frontier" (Gone Indian, p. 9). Innocent and in need of experience, he consoles himself with grip exercises, push ups, and sit ups; he feels a constant need to improve himself. His urban background has hardly prepared him for an adventure in the wilderness. He believes he was named after Jeremy Bentham, the ultimate scholar and professor, and feels that there was an expectation in his own family that some day he would become a professor. But as Jeremy reviews his own graduate program in English--the failed dissertation, exhausting teaching, and final oral examination that never came--he realizes that he would have made a poor scholar indeed.

As Jeremy confesses to Professor Madham, this combination of urban life and scholarly activity has led to an odd sexual problem. He can get an erection when he is standing up, but not when he is lying down. He believes that this perhaps is due to the "OATH OF CHASTITY" (Gone Indian, p. 36) he took when he was ten, and he often refers to himself through the sexual metaphor. He recalls his affair with a Miss Cohen at university; surrounded by copies of the Norton Anthology, the Anatomy of Criticism, and Notes and Queries, they had made love while standing up against a bookcase. But Jeremy is impotent in bed with his wife Carol, even though he suggests she read to him from Gibbon's Decline and Fall; as he explains, "maybe I'm so programmed that I have to be in a learning situation" (Gone Indian, p. 55). As in The Studhorse Man, the penis plays the part of a trickster. When Jeremy is worried he attempts to "flog" his "limp imagination" (Gone Indian, p. 53), and when he is cold he worries because his penis may "freeze off" (Gone Indian, p. 17). His only real sexual triumph comes when he is able to make love while lying down with Bea Sunderman, but he has already found out this new sexual potency while resting in a coffin.

These double symbols of creation and death emphasize Jeremy's need to reject the competitive values of his former urban life. Appropriately, he chooses as his model the mysterious Grey Owl, a man who left his native England in order to live in Canada as an Indian. This "model from the utmost cultivated shores of the civilized world" (Gone Indian, p. 7) fascinates Jeremy but also terrifies him. He wants to emulate Grey Owl, but knows that to create Grey Owl another Englishman, the uninteresting Archie Belaney, actually "died into a new life" (Gone Indian, p. 62). For although Grey Owl seemed to be a real Indian, he was actually an imposter and an illusion. And when Jeremy decides that he too must live as an Indian, he also becomes an illusion. Dressed in levis, moccasins, and a buckskin jacket, he resembles an Indian so much that he is actually arrested and taken for one. But as soon as he speaks to a real Indian it becomes clear that Jeremy is a fake. In the city he has played at being an Indian, but never before has he attempted to live the experience:

> I remembered, and tried to forget, and remembered: a sticky hot day in the summertime, with the bigger kids playing cowboy and me being the Indian. I didn't want to be the Indian at all. They told me, You be the Indian, Sadness. We'll hunt you down. No matter where you hide, we'll hunt you down. We'll kill you. And they threw broken bricks and they tied me up and stuck lit matches into the seams of my shoes. . . . (Gone Indian, p. 94)

Divorced from the environment of the city, urban man defines himself by means of primitive rituals. The Notikeewin Winter Games represent the primitive combat through which Jeremy can define his new self, for he travels by dog sled and snowmobile rather than by bus and train.

As he defines his new, anti-urban self, Jeremy moves through spiritual chaos. He views himself as an academic failure, as indeed he is, and at one point contemplates a suicide leap from the high level bridge in Edmonton. He is further confused by the appearance of several vague, undefined characters who seem to have died and then spoken after death. Robert Sunderman apparently died while playing hockey, but phoned his wife after he died. The Sunderman house is appropriately called "WORLDS END. Some one had left out the apostrophe" (Gone Indian, p. 330). But the character who most concerns Jeremy is the mysterious Roger Dorck, whose suitcase Jeremy has picked up by mistake. When Jeremy calls Dorck's wife, he finds that Dorck went to the U. S. on business and cannot be located; later, he discovers that Dorck has met with a snowmobile accident and is lying unconscious in a nearby hospital. After a leap of legendary proportions on his snowmobile, Dorck is carried into "Our Lady of Sorrows Hospital" in Notikeewin and there he remains. The Northern "Kingdom of Dorck. Snow. And the cold sun" (Gone Indian, p. 25) must put on a winter festival without its ruler in attendance.

Dorck himself is a trickster figure who represents the creative unconscious Jeremy is trying to explore.[40]

Usually Dorck is the judge at the Festival, and his absence forces Jeremy to decide whether or not he is capable of being a judge. The records Dorck has kept of previous contests are not available to Jeremy, and since Dorck remains in a coma until the end of the novel he can give Jeremy no guidance. Hence except for Professor Madham's admonishments and unhelpful directions, Jeremy is completely on his own. If he is to judge the contestants at the Carnival, the final decision will be his alone.

When Jeremy reverts to his academic mentality for aid, however, he receives little help. Professor Madham is himself the judge of Jeremy, a judge who cannot resist the impulse to evaluate. And since he plays the part of Jeremy's academic alter ego, Professor Madham is often confused with Jeremy himself. As Jeremy says to him, "one false move, Professor, and instead of addressing you, I'll be you" (Gone Indian, p. 62). As Jeremy's thesis director, Professor Madham has arranged a job interview for him at the University of Alberta; but we suspect this is really because the Professor is having an affair with Jeremy's wife Carol. And Professor Madham is the stereotype of the college English professor. A pompous bachelor of forty-seven, he has a social life centred around the faculty club and regular "Friday Night Mead Suppers" (Gone Indian, p. 43). The rest of his time is spent grading papers and writing a book on "The Tragic Vision in Modern Prose," which is pretentiously dedicated to "Professors Grunt and Fart for drinking stout with me in London" (Gone Indian,

p. 49). Since Jeremy looks and sounds like a member of the counter-culture, it is not surprising that Professor Madham's "greying wavy hair," "squash player's perfect figure," and omnipresent "pipe" are anathema to him (Gone Indian, p. 60).

Professor Madham's tendency to judge, to classify rather than to explore, is characteristic of academia. While he is editing Jeremy's tape recordings, the Professor cannot resist adding little sarcastic comments of his own. Although he correctly realizes that the prairies symbolize the "continent interior" in Jeremy's voyage of self-discovery (Gone Indian, p. 13), he thinks the tapes reveal his student to be "avoiding life" and "failing miserably" (Gone Indian, p. 25). He is unable to avoid approaching the tapes as if they were a student's term paper, and he complains that Jeremy "simply does not give us adequate motivation, adequate allowance, for what happens" (Gone Indian, p. 30). And he often inserts marginal comments that indicate he does not really understand Jeremy at all. His transcript of Jeremy's tapes must be viewed with suspicion; as we have seen in the Watergate tapes, a transcript cannot represent the total content of the tape medium, for it must omit the speech patterns and inflections which are basic to the form.

Although Jeremy is rejecting the academic approach and is fleeing from it, he is limited by the academic quality of his own vision. His "stumbling, ossified, PhD-seeking mind" (Gone Indian, p. 7) sees everything in metaphors, in symbols; he hates Professor Madham's "go-get-a-job syndrome, publish, head a committee" (Gone Indian, p. 19), but cannot escape from seeing all experience in academic terms. When he is asked about women, for instance, he pompously replies that "I think I know something about women. I've done some graduate work in that area of specialization" (Gone Indian, p. 65). He "skims" the titles of books in Jill Sunderman's bookcase so he can impress Chairman Balding in his interview. When he is asked to judge the princesses in the Notikeewin Winter Carnival, he cannot avoid "marking" them individually; as he puts it, "something in me wanted to write in the margins of those lives: Awk. Frag. Emph. Cap. Fig " (Gone Indian, p. 114). Nine years of graduate school have made him arbitrary as well as submissive.

Jeremy may well be one object in Professor Madham's "collection of beautiful objects" (Gone Indian, p. 60). He can compose articulate letters of reference and imaginative epitaphs, but neither of these does him much good in the world of the living, for he cannot finish his dissertation and thus cannot get a job. And he is willing to sacrifice a lot in order to complete the thesis; as he explains, "I took an oath not to screw until my dissertation is submitted for binding" (Gone Indian, p. 54). His interminable thesis project represents the ultimate academic absurdity. Titles and dedications become obsessions, for Jeremy loses interest as soon as he begins a particular topic:

> "Going Down With Orpheus."
> Eighteen months and four hundred pages. Abandoned.
> "The Artist as Clown and Pornographer."
> Nine months of reading and three hundred index cards. Sold to an M. A. candidate for twenty dollars.
> "The Columbus Quest: The Dream, the Journey, the Surprise."
> Eighteen weeks. I couldn't get past the first sentence. (Gone Indian, p. 62)

In fact, Jeremy begins to see life itself in terms of his dissertation. During the Notikeewin snowshoe race, for instance, he begins a dissertation called "Collapse: The Theory and Practice" (Gone Indian, p. 86); after making love to Bea Sunderman, he thinks he may reflect his success by writing one called "The Quest Unquestioned" (Gone Indian, p. 149). None of these attempts goes beyond a title, but he has brought along six notebooks in case ideas start to flow quickly, and if he should finish one page he will immediately Xerox it "lest the original be destroyed in a two-plane crash or a bombing outrage" (Gone Indian, p. 24). Yet even in the multiplicity of imaginative experiences in Notikeewin, inspiration does not come to Jeremy's academic mind.

Trained by the urban academic world to judge, to classify, and to evaluate, Jeremy finds himself in a situation where these skills are useless. At the Winter Carnival he is even addressed as "Judge," and people are impressed because he has come all the way from New York. Yet he finds the beauty contest cannot be judged, though his academic conscience tells him he must judge. In spite of his academic qualifications, he has no right to judge the beauty contest, and he knows it. As he tries to reach a conclusion, he thinks of "Dissertation Number Eight," which appropriately takes the form of "Colon: Blank" and then, finally, "The Forgery of Distance: Ritual For a Long Night" (Gone Indian, p. 113). After futile attempts to classify the contestants as I, II, and III or as RED, WHITE, and YELLOW, he finally places the crown on the head of the "BUFFALO WOMAN," Miss Jill Sunderman, who is not even running in the contest (Gone Indian, p. 122). And in so doing he symbolically rejects the statistical mind, the academic mentality; he opts out of urban society by refusing to participate in one of its own rituals--the beauty contest. Gone Indian is a brilliant work and a fitting ending to Kroetsch's Notikeewin trilogy. Jeremy's flight from the urban, mechanical technology of the university leads him to the global village; the electronic technology of the tape recorder gives him a new freedom to explore his own sensibility. He leaves the imposed technology of the city, and he enters a new, unexplored environment linked to the city only by electronic media. The field theory of the tribal village supersedes the mechanical rigidity of contemporary urban life.

CHAPTER V

MICHAEL ONDAATJE: THE NEW SURREALISM

The new sensibility expands human awareness in space and time; art forms from earlier environments are retrieved, and are set within the electronic environment of the sixties. The experiments of modernist artists reappear in our age, and these define new works of art. In Canada, the new sensibility leads to a renewed interest in surrealism, a phenomenon of the post World War I period. Indeed, many of Margaret Atwood's poems are surrealistic explorations of modern man's fate in a technological universe. Her use of surrealism can be called a neo-surrealism, or the new surrealism. Among other new writers who use this art form, Michael Ondaatje is perhaps the most interesting. His first book of poems, The Dainty Monsters (1967), is based largely on techniques related to the new surrealism. In Ondaatje's poetry, we find little concern for chronological order or strict pattern, and little interest in realism. Instead the poet creates for us a lush imaginative landscape peopled with the exotic and the bizarre. Historical or mythic subjects may recur, but the artist must recreate these in his own image; and the only image we have of Ondaatje the artist is that which appears in his poems. He is a sort of [illegible]t juggler, a poet who creates beautiful artifacts for us.[1] The only reality is the imagination, which plays strange tricks.

In Ondaatje's garden of the exotic and the grotesque, we see strange mythic creatures moving through a shifting natural landscape. There are monsters and strange beasts that are half man and half machine; or there may be machines that behave like animals. With their own peculiar reality they move through a twisted world, and are dainty only because they are precise. When they kill, it is with a surgical precision. Ondaatje takes the mechanism of the early twentieth century and juxtaposes it against a universe of dreams. The shadows of those dreams represent the reality of our own perceptions in the world. Emblematic and frightening, funny and perverse, Ondaatje's dainty monsters move through the shadows in the dark night of the soul.

In the poem "The Republic," we are introduced to the landscape in which these monsters move. Ondaatje uses the metaphor of a pot made by the technique of coiling clay to suggest the diligence, the boredom of modern life. "The house, exact,/ coils with efficiency and style," and there seems to be "a different heaven here."[2] Plants that are fed daily always "flush with decent green/ and meet the breeze with polish" (Dainty Monsters, p. 20). Every morning as the sun rises, the gardenias "revitalize/ and meet the morning with decorum" (Dainty Monsters, p. 20). When the sun shines during the day, these plants are well behaved. They are appropriate reflections of man's diligence and his need to bring suggestions of Nature indoors.

"No dancing with the wind here," (Dainty Monsters, p. 20), the poet tells us, for there is no celebration in the lifeless environment in which these plants live. Indeed, "air is even remade in the basement" (Dainty Monsters, p. 20); everything is synthetic. Heaven is a thermostatically controlled environment that controls temperature, humidity, and thus even life itself. Even the air is recirculated and used again.

But as the mechanism of the clock "swaggers in the hall" (Dainty Monsters, p. 20) and time progresses, the plants awake. And they become Ondaatje's monsters, for they are alive. Within the air conditioned nightmare they awake and tremble; they shake their leaves and begin to crawl. As if in a horror film, they begin to destroy the hand that nurtures them. And like the monster Dr. Frankenstein created, they cannot be controlled. "While we sleep/ the plants in frenzy heave floors apart" (Dainty Monsters, p. 20), and the dream landscape of urban man becomes a nightmare. The controlled environment turns upon itself and begins to self-destruct. The plants "lust with common daisies,/ feel rain" (Dainty Monsters, p. 20); they move through the shadows of the imagination. Only the clock watches as the conventions of twentieth century man are mocked during the night. For these are the surrealistic images of the unconscious; when man's life becomes overly rational, "passions crack the mask in dreams" (Dainty Monsters, p. 20). During the day man feeds his plants and watches them grow, but at night these same plants take on a new, frightening existence. They become shapes of darkness, and they can kill.

Ondaatje's monsters represent the chaos beneath the surface tranquillity of modern domestic life. In "You Can Look But You Better Not Touch," man lives in a "cage--30 feet High" (Dainty Monsters, p. 32) and moves mechanically like "parts/ of elaborate metronomes" (Dainty Monsters, p. 33). His world is that of the photograph in the travel brochure, "a vast Miami postcard/ in the midst of grey Riverdale" (Dainty Monsters, p. 33). The boredom of domestic ritual is like an old faded photograph, and the monsters in this landscape become elements of natural detail. In the poem "The Respect of Landscapes," the poet describes his monsters as exotic, mechanical emblems:

> The skies and forms from my muted landscape
> had little of the physique of animals,
> metallic they centred outside me--
> the splayed yawns, the eyes
> at eye level always.
> A world of white and black and dark scabbed trees.
> (Dainty Monsters, p. 50)

To enter "into this colour world," man must "take the egoism of cigarette cartonned birds" and become "like them the centre" (Dainty Monsters, p. 50). Man defines art in a technological universe by assuming the voices of shifting technologies; art becomes a dream composed of dying animals and silent birds.

The controlled environment makes man himself a specimen. Categorized and catalogued, he has no control over his own identity, for he is constantly watched. The air he breathes is recirculated; the water he drinks is treated with chemicals and purified. As the poet tells us in "Signature," the world is a giant hospital in which we leave the mechanical spare parts from our own bodies. "Three floors down/ my appendix/ swims in a jar" (Dainty Monsters, p. 25), the patient complains, and he realizes that "everyone has scars which crawl/ into the mystery of swimming trunks" (Dainty Monsters, p. 24). Stretched on the operating table, the patient tries to escape, but "the room closed on me like an eyelid" (Dainty Monsters, p. 24). In only seven seconds, man is reduced from a human being to a hospital case, a laboratory curiosity. And then the surgeon's knife removes the appendix, and it is sent away to be stored in a bottle of formaldehyde. When the patient awakes, he is only a "sweating marble saint/ full of demerol and sleeping pills," and he hears the ominous humming of "the rain/ falling like white bees on the sidewalk" (Dainty Monsters, p. 24).

Like the expert surgeon in the hospital, the modern poet destroys as he maintains a life. He cuts away the living tissue to reveal the truth of a technological age. Ondaatje's aesthetic is a precise instrument, and his language is finely made. His monsters are dainty and exotic, but they move with the precision of watches. In the poem "Eventually the Poem for Keewaydin," Ondaatje attacks the cliches of language in the technological age; "we accept more than to write about it," he says, for "the superficial is the poet's paradise" (Dainty Monsters,

p. 39). The modern poet deals with surfaces, with illusions, but not in a superficial way. For beneath the "mass of stars in the "censoring lake" (Dainty Monsters, p. 39) there is a deeper, more disturbing reality. Beneath the lake's surface live Ondaatje's monsters, and they appear only at night. Their domain is the ocean bottom and the earth's centre; their eyes shine with mechanized horror. Silently they destroy those who created them, used them, and worshipped them. The religion of technology comes full circle, and like giant beetles cars turn on the natural environment and devour it:

> And yet tonight I sat on the steps
> and noticed that the cars too with their white eyes
> fussed in their circle of space; their brown backs
> surfaced with gum and dust,
> they chomped quietly into bushes,
> their chrome teeth moving among the pith of the night.
> (Dainty Monsters, p. 39)

The universe of The Dainty Monsters is a technological hell of violence and pain. By viewing man as a precision mechanism out of control, Ondaatje presents modern urban life as a fragmented world of nightmare. In the poem "Peter," the victim, who is actually Peter himself, becomes "little more than a marred stone,/ a baited gargoyle, escaped/ from the fountain in the courtyard" (Dainty Monsters, p. 73). Since his tongue has been cut out, his throat is "swollen like an arm muscle" and he must speak "with the air of his body,/ torturing breath into tones" (Dainty Monsters, p. 73). Like a man who has had his larynx removed because of throat cancer, Peter can only grunt, for "they had made a dead animal of his throat" (Dainty Monsters, p. 73). He cannot speak and can hardly walk; his legs drag "like a suitcase behind him" (Dainty Monsters, p. 74). Robbed of his vitality by the new technology, he becomes a sacrifice to modern science. For the new science changes the personality as it changes man's physical characteristics. As he is operated on and parts are modified and replaced, Peter becomes a pendulum, an ominous reminder of the diabolical mechanical tortures in Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Pit and the Pendulum." In Ondaatje's poem, however, man himself is the pendulum; the victim becomes the executioner:

> They snared him in evening light,
> his body a pendulum
> between the walls of the yard,
> rearing from shrinking flashes of steel
> until they, with a new science,
> stretched his heels and limbs,
> scarred through the back of his knees
> leaving his veins unpinned,
> and him singing in the evening air.
> (Dainty Monsters, p. 72)

The torturer becomes the tortured, and in a precise way man turns his technological expertise upon himself. He operates to save a life, and yet spiritually destroys that life. Indeed for Ondaatje language is surgery, a probing through to the basis of technological experience. His dainty monsters may be well trained, but they have no moral sense at all.

ONDAATJE USES THE NEW SURREALISM TO RELATE THE NEW SENSIBILITY TO A UNIVERSE OF DISCARDED MECHANICAL TECHNOLOGIES

Ondaatje's monsters are those of a technological nightmare. Balanced and finely tuned, they move with the precision of watches and kill with ease. As in the writing of bp Nichol, language itself becomes a machine, with parts that can be removed and substituted at will. The semantic environment is one of discarded technologies, and the artist-outsider fits these together to form complex, intriguing mechanisms that fly, swim, and crawl. Ondaatje's experiments in the dream monologue form in The Man With Seven Toes (1969) unify the mechanistic universe of The Dainty Monsters and Rat Jelly with the multi-media universe of The Collected Works of Billy the Kid. In The Man With Seven Toes, Ondaatje presents the story of a Mrs. Fraser, a Scottish woman who was shipwrecked among the aborigines in Queensland and then led back to safety by a deserting convict. The narrative is presented as a surrealistic monologue shifting between the voices of the convict Potter, Mrs. Fraser and an omniscient narrator. History becomes a new form of perception in the present; the focus is on how we create history through our own perceptions, a history that becomes a form of intuitive, unintellectualized myth.[3]

In The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, Eliot explores Prufrock's environment through a shifting dream monologue that is both within Prufrock and outside him. Prufrock's paralysis is emphasized by his vision of himself "sprawling on a pin" and "pinned and wriggling on the wall"; he sees his image "as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen."[4] Mechanical technologies project and amplify man's knowledge of his own perceptions. As Sheila Watson points out, Ondaatje's universe is a "primitive world inhabited by primitive machines."[5] Mrs. Fraser's journey with the convict is a nightmare; swamps and rivers come alive with mechanical birds and trees:

> Kept to the river, frail
> as nerves in the desert
> the banks pocked with hoof trails.
>
> He described sometimes the night birds
> who clawed the barks of trees
> sucking out cocaine, so one could catch them
> staggering in the sand at dawn
> their nerves clogged and rotted with drug
> feather caked with a red vomit.[6]

In descending through the subconscious to find the self, we lose conscious perception. Reactions become unintellectualized, automatic. The dainty monsters of the mind appear and change all perceptions into nightmare. As in Robert Kroetsch's But We Are Exiles, the river is a guide to exploration, but it is also a path to madness. Mrs. Fraser is a screen, a map on which the subconscious terrors of the mechanical age can be projected and then traced.

Ondaatje's interest in mechanical precision is combined with a surrealistic sense of the bizarre. As in a Dali landscape, the subject of nightmare is outlined with exact clarity. "Necks weaved out/ waved like sea/ muscles in thighs/ flexed and sent them/ upside down/ to stand on the sky," we are told, and "walk of prowlers/ mimed snarls spat/ at mythical prey" (Seven Toes, p. 15). Using a filmic technique that prefigures that of The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Ondaatje shifts rapidly from one subconscious image to another. Each lyric in The Man With Seven Toes might be called a slide, a photographic representation of the life of the creative mind. Yet each slide is alive and is like a unique film in itself. The bodies "muscled tight as fists" have their own perceptual reality; they celebrate, dance, and die--and are then regenerated from jettisoned mechanical parts. As they move in the darkness, they "chewed the tangle, tossed limbs away/ that one imagined/ grew from others" (Seven Toes, p. 15). The cycle of nightmare becomes self-perpetuating.

As in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, characters are low definition and represent states of the human subconscious. The convict, Potter, is Mrs. Fraser's shadow, a figure of undefined evil exemplifying the latent evil in her character. Disfigured by the shifting mechanism of the "grey swamp," Potter finds "he's lost toes,/ the stumps sheer/ as from ideal knives" (Seven Toes, p. 22). When he first appears to Mrs. Fraser, it is as "the hub of vast ripples/ that came to her/ and hit her at the knees" (Seven Toes, p. 18). A monster from a science fiction movie, he is dressed in "clothes rotted, flesh/ burned purple, split in streaks," yet he is still a fabulous imaginative creation with his shirt "striped and fabulous/

like beast skin in greenery" (Seven Toes, p. 33). His close relationship with Mrs. Fraser is symbolized by a tourniquet, one of the artifacts linking the modern technological age with the past:

> He had tattoos on his left hand
> a snake with five heads
> the jaws waiting
> his fingernails chipped tongues;
> crossing a stream
> he steadied her elbow
> and she tensed body
> like a tourniquet to him.
> (Seven Toes, p. 21)

The dialogue between Potter and Mrs. Fraser is similar to that found in the poetry of the seventeenth century metaphysical poets. Different aspects of the personality appear as vague, undefined characters who are often opposed. The poet's personality becomes a map, a confusing and misleading guide to the subconscious. In the poem "Hymn to God My God, in My Sickness," for instance, Donne views his physicians as "cosmographers, and I their map, who lie/ Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown/ That this is my southwest discovery."[7] And as she examines herself after her nightmare, Mrs. Fraser also sees her body as a map: "She moved fingers onto the rough skin,/ traced the obvious ribs, the running heart,/ sensing herself like a map, then/ lowering her hands into her body" (Seven Toes, p. 41). Indeed, Potter may well be only part of her dream, a manifestation of sickness and delirium. Stripped of her clothes during her journey, she is unprotected from the night shapes which "swing/ spit leaf juice at you/ in purple as a bladder" (Seven Toes, p. 24). The images of technological nightmare pursue her and she cannot escape. Her civilized manners are no protection against the mechanized nightmare; like Margaret Atwood's Susanna Moodie, she must surrender to the environment in order to endure it.

But Ondaatje's natural world is not the predominantly natural one we discover in The Journals of Susanna Moodie. It is rather an assembly of exotic parts which function with the precision of a machine. As Mrs. Fraser finishes her journey, we find that her "eyes were grey beetles/ toes were half gone/ chest was a rain sky/ shirt was a rainbow" (Seven Toes, p. 40); she and Potter become the same person. During the journey, the "raw and wounded" sky takes on characteristics of a personality (Seven Toes, p. 17). And the swamp through which they travel comes alive as it moves "things against us/ necks throbbing at our feet/ could feel them fight/ wrapped around each other like worms" (Seven Toes, p. 25). Images of modern science and technology create the swamp as a mechanized adversary:

> Sun disappears after noon
> after the purple glare
> clashes down the side of trees.
> Then swamp is blue
> green, the mist
> sitting like toads.
> Leaves spill snakes
> their mouths arched
> with bracelets of teeth.
> Once a bird, silver
> with arm wide wings
> flew a trail between trees
> and never stopped,
> caught all the sun
> and spun like mercury away from us.
> (Seven Toes, p. 23)

In The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Ondaatje proceeds to define his world through the interplay of technological devices. The universe of The Man With Seven Toes is a primitive version of that environment. "Sky was a wrecked black boot/ a white world spilling through," we are told, and noise is "like electricity in the leaves" (Seven Toes, p. 32). Extending themselves through various technologies, men become machines controlled by "fanatically thin,/ Black ropes of muscle" (Seven Toes, p. 11). Their faces are "scarred with decoration/ feathers, bones, paint from clay/ pasted, skewered to their skin" (Seven Toes, p. 11). Ondaatje's aborigines, it appears, are the technological men of the past transposed into our own time.

ART BECOMES A HAPPENING IN THE NEW SENSIBILITY

The technological reality Ondaatje sees is based upon the existence of surfaces, of illusions. In the twentieth century, the world is a puzzle, and we cope with reality by putting pieces together and trying to complete a picture. Yet the dainty monsters of the imagination continue to haunt us. Ondaatje's major work, The Collected Works of Billy the Kid (1970), explores the idea of illusion through a variety of media: poems, casual thoughts, interviews, passages of surrealistic prose, and faded black and white photographs. Much of the action in the book is "framed" by margins, windows, and doors, and indeed the work has been called a "photo album" or "snapshot reality."[8] Because the legend of Billy the Kid has obscured the reality of Billy's cruelty, Ondaatje the imaginative historian must recreate, must project himself into Billy's mind to find out the truth. Though the finely honed edge of Ondaatje's lyric poetry in The Dainty Monsters resembles a surgeon's knife, the technique adopted by the poet in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid is that of the roving eye of the camera. The mask then becomes the camera, which has equal access to public myth and private morality. And as we might expect, Ondaatje's pictures are sharp and well-composed.[9]

In Robert Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man, the narrator Demeter became concerned with the problem of whether truth lies in the man or in his biography. If truth resides in a biography, is it not reasonable to assume that medium is more important than content? But if truth resides in the man himself, it is difficult for any medium to capture the essence of that man. The historical facts about Billy then are modified in each book written about him, and eventually the legend begins to obscure the man. Ondaatje's The Collected Works of Billy the Kid is an attempt to explore the difference between the reality of the illusion of how we see Billy in the twentieth century, and the illusion of the reality of how he was seen in the past. In the modern age, Billy has become a romantic hero, a legendary outlaw, and a personification of Hollywood's obsession with tales of the Wild West.[10] Using the camera as roving eye, Ondaatje actually takes "stills" from a film about Billy and presents these to us in the form of a montage. As these photographs are developed, we see an emerging picture of Billy; we observe Billy, and yet are observed by him:

> I send you a picture of Billy made with the Perry shutter as quick as it can be worked--Pyro and soda developer. I am making daily experiments now and find I am able to take passing horses at a lively trot square across the line of fire--bits of snow in the air--spokes well defined--some blur on top of wheel but sharp in the main--men walking are no trick--I will send you proofs sometime. I shall show you what can be done from the saddle without ground glass or tripod--please notice when you get the specimens that they were made with the lens wide open and many of the best exposed when my horse was in motion.[11]

In order to put together the puzzle that is Billy's life, the poet projects himself into Billy's mind. The fragments of the past appear and reappear, but they form no consistent order. As in a film, there are "flashbacks" showing us Billy's past, his love life, and his formidable opponent Pat Garrett, the "ideal assassin" (Billy the Kid, p. 28). An "academic murderer" (Billy the Kid, p. 28), Garrett collects stuffed birds; and when he shoots Billy, he has a new specimen for his collection. And when Billy dies, it is not as a Western hero but rather "with a fish stare, with a giggle/ with blood planets in his head" (Billy the Kid, p. 104).

In an "Exclusive Jail Interview" reprinted from The Texas Star, Billy claims that "I could only be arrested if they had proof, definite proof, not just stories" (Billy the Kid, p. 81). But actually we have only stories about Billy, romantic stories which have created a myth. The legend of the romantic outlaw is created and sustained by different media;

the legend begins in oral tales of Billy's exploits and then progresses to books about Billy and, finally, to films detailing his life. The reality of Billy is eventually obscured by myth, which is often easier to accept than reality. The film The Bridge on the River Kwai, for instance, was based on a fictitious book by Pierre Boulle and filmed at a bridge not even on the River Kwai; yet today tourists can visit a little bridge on the Kwai, and they associate this bridge with the romantic exploits shown in the film. Although this bridge is real, the book and film were fictional. But the tale of heroism in the film is easier for us to accept than the sordid details of what actually happened during the Second World War, and we tend to accept romantic myth as reality. In the same way, we like to think of Billy the Kid as a heroic, isolated figure rather than a common murderer.

Ondaatje reprints passages from "Billy the Kid and the Princess," a story in The True Life of Billy the Kid. On the cover of this inexpensive paperback, there is a picture of Billy gazing into the distance, one hand clasping his rifle and the other his six-shooter. The story begins as a conventional romance. "There'd been a cattle war in Jackson County," we are told, "Billy the Kid turned his cayuse south . . . splashed across the drought dried Rio Grande . . . and let the sun bake the tension out of his mind and body" (Billy the Kid, p. 99). But as the tale proceeds, the medium changes. Unimpressed by "the magnificent richness of his surroundings" (Billy the Kid, p. 100), Billy is involved in a fight seen in comic strip terms:

> That was his Sunday punch . . . and Toro laughed at it! Now, Billy the Kid knows he's in for a struggle!
> "He's got a granite jaw which means . . . I'll have to weaken him with powerful hooks to the stomach!
> OOOOWWW!" THUD!
> "Now it's my turn!"
> "If he lays a hand on me . . ."
> SWISSS!
> SOCK!
> "I keel you gringo!"
> Thinks: "my head . . . he busted my jaw!"
> TOCK!
> Thinks: "he's a stomper . . ."
> "I keel your pet gringo Excellencia!"
> (Billy the Kid, p. 101)

In a world of new media and shifting technologies, we find that the medium and the message are identical. If art is the mirror of experience and experience is real, art becomes only an image. The way a historian assembles pictures of the past comes to define the past, for the printed record can never be definitive.

The Collected Works of Billy the Kid is similar to the new "oral history" written by men such as Barry Broadfoot and Louis Terkel. The interviewer asks questions of various people, but he tries to avoid editing their replies into a homogeneous form. In Ten Lost Years, for example, Barry Broadfoot merely asked a number of people what their experiences were in the Depression and then recorded their responses. Many of the surrealistic prose passages in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid might well be transcripts of tape recordings. Since there is no editor to interpose himself between Billy and the reader, these passages have the roughness and directness of common speech. "I didn't know who it was," Billy tells us at one point, "a tray of things in her right hand, a lamp in the other carrying them. Me screaming stop stop STOP THERE you're going to fall on me! My picture now sliding so she with her tray and her lamp jerked up to the ceiling and floated down calm again and jerked to the ceiling and floated down calm again and continued forward crushing me against the wall only I didn't feel anything yet" (Billy the Kid, p. 34). Billy the artist is both observer and observed; he holds the camera and takes the picture, but he is actually the subject of every photograph.

The modern myth of Billy the Kid obscures the meaning of this dual role as both victor and victim. Violence comes to define Billy's life, and his expertise as a killer keeps him alive. After shooting a man named Gregory, he notes that "I'd shot him well and careful/ made it explode under his heart/ so it wouldn't last long" (Billy the Kid, p. 15), and the mechanical precision of killing comes to define his perception. Ultimately he becomes the victim of the mechanistic Pat Garrett, but his behaviour is very similar to Garrett's, for both men act as machines. Billy admires the precision of machines and sees man as an assembly of mechanical parts; looking across the floor, he sees "the bones across a room/ shifting in a wrist" (Billy the Kid, p. 39). "Ribs," he finds, are "blossoming out like springs" (Billy the Kid, p. 40). And yet one malfunction in a machine destroys the machine, and leads to technological chaos:

> Or in the East have seen
> the dark grey yards where trains are fitted
> and the clean speed of machines
> that make machines, their
> red golden pouring which when cooled
> mists out to rust or grey.
>
> The beautiful machines pivoting on themselves
> sealing and fusing to others
> and men throwing levers like coins at them.
> And there is there the same stress as with stars,
> the one altered move that will make them maniac.
> (Billy the Kid, p. 41)

In the centre of this mechanistic universe stands Billy himself, a true portrait of the artist as outlaw. Speaking through the mask provided by Billy, Ondaatje explores the role of modern man in a technological universe. Billy's victimization is presented in images of violence, but mythic heroes like Billy are common in today's entertainment world. Admired and condemned, they present romantic stereotypes with whom each generation seems to identify. Their values may be deplored, but their influence is unquestioned.

IN RAT JELLY, THE MACHINE IS ARCHETYPALIZED BY THE NEW ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGY

Ondaatje's best known work is The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, which is a successful attempt to capture the myth of the artist-outsider in Western society. In exploring this myth, the poet uses a cinematographic technique of sudden shifts, juxtapositions, and flashbacks. The documents he collects as fragments of Billy's past appear through the roving eye of the camera. In an effort to overcome the limitations of space and time, Ondaatje gives us a highly personal, idiosyncratic view of Billy the Kid; the camera gives us glimpses, blurred snapshots, and from this collection we must assemble the legend of Billy for ourselves. Ondaatje's last book of poems, Rat Jelly (1973), is a logical continuation of the poet's concern with new media as documents of experience. Although Rat Jelly is more a collection of lyric poems than a scrapbook like The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, the book shows Ondaatje's interest in the power of various media and the effects of media on our perceptions. The camera and the motion picture belong to the old mechanism, but the newspaper hybridizes with the new electronic media of telegraph and telephone, and hence belongs to the new sensibility. In Rat Jelly, Ondaatje explores how the new sensibility archetypalizes the mechanism of earlier environments; the machine is surrounded by the new technological environment, and a new art form is created.[12] The bizarre universe of The Dainty Monsters reappears as the world of newspapers, consumer items, and discarded mechanical technologies; and the rats themselves are magnified so that they become monsters.

In the book's title poem, "Rat Jelly," the rat suggests a macabre dimension of modern life. "I took great care in cooking this treat for you," the poet explains, bringing in a frozen rat "on a glass tray."[13] In the fridge he has frozen the rat, has effectively stopped time itself, for the rat is just as gruesome as it was in real life. The observer is asked to "see the rat in the jelly/ steaming dirty hair/ frozen, bring it out on a glass tray," and then to "split the pie four ways and eat" (Rat Jelly, p. 31). The images of consumer life, the fridge and the pie, assume a new significance when they are juxtaposed against the rat, a symbol of nightmare. For the rat is steaming, and has apparently been frozen while still alive. "I want you to know it's rat/ steamy dirty hair and still alive," the poet tells us, and in fact he caught the rat "last sunday/ thinking of the fridge, thinking of you" (Rat Jelly, p. 31). The rat may even have assumed the flavours of other delicacies stored in the fridge--perhaps of "exotic fish or/ maybe the expensive arse of a cow" (Rat Jelly, p. 31). As a consumer item, the rat is macabre; yet most consumer items evoke similar feelings before they are cleaned, packaged in cellophane, and sent out to the supermarket. Both fish and cow were once alive; but modern man prefers to ignore anything except the final, synthetic product.

The power of Ondaatje's verse resides largely in his comparison of ordinary domestic symbols with those of the unconscious. In the poem "A Bad Taste," for instance, a perfectly ordinary lecture is announced in the newspaper: "A PhD lecture by Mr. S. H. Kung will take place today, Thursday March 21 at 4 pm in Room 147, Medical Science Building. Mr. Kung will speak on 'Changes in Dorsal Root

Ganglia of the Rat following Peripheral Nerve Section'" (Rat Jelly, p. 42). As we know, rats are used in psychological experiments in human behaviour, and they can be conditioned just as humans can be. The lecture may be academic, but the subject is not. For those who listen to the lecture on rats, it seems, have become rats themselves. "Living in London he came closer to the rats," we are told, "there was rat chambers, rat curnoe, and rat fones" (Rat Jelly, p. 42). These are the "grey flecked university rats" who "leave their white refuse/ across the corridors of the Paradise Lost Motel" (Rat Jelly, p. 43). Indeed, they are the academic rats, and when they are frozen into "rat jelly" only a grotesque reminder of life still appears:

> But it was the rat in Ezra who wrote best,
> that dirt thought we want as guest
> travelling mad within the poem
> eating up punctuation, who farts
> heat into the line. You see
> them shaved in the anthology.
> You will be frozen and glib when
> they aim for the sponge under the rib.
> (Rat Jelly, p. 43)

Ondaatje often reminds us of Robert Kroetsch, and in their explorations of the impact of various technologies the two writers are very similar. They both assume an anti-academic stance, though ironically both are academics, and both are aware of the debilitating effects mechanical technologies can have on the creative arts. As the electronic environment replaces the mechanical age, we automatically use past technologies in the context of our new freedom. Ondaatje's neo-surrealism is partly based on this recognition. In our concern with past technologies, we become automatons or somnambulists; and we cannot seem to forget these technologies of the past. As the poet tells us in "War Machine," "they'll come at you like non-fiction whips/ stories too bout vivien leigh princess margaret/ frank sinatra the night he beat up mia farrow" (Rat Jelly, p. 11). Consumerism defines modern life, a combination of "monopoly volleyball cards ping pong/ tennis late movies hitchcock sergio leone" (Rat Jelly, p. 11).

In Rat Jelly, Ondaatje internalizes the mechanism of technology, and thus the poet-outsider becomes the machine. He sets the past environment of mechanical technology within the electronic environment of the new sensibility, and the machine is archetypalized by the new electronic technology. Marshall McLuhan has explained how the most characteristic twentieth century art consists of one environment placed around another environment. In the electronic age, the simultaneity of the new media allows man to view experience and then to replay it.[14] The tape recorder in Gone Indian allows instant recall, re-recording, and sound on sound; instant replay becomes a way of life. In the poem "Looking Into THE PROJECTOR," Ondaatje reverses the filmic image, and instead looks at the passing of film frames themselves. The projector reveals that a man falling from a building is being ripped apart as if "he has been/ thrown like a suitcase out/ of the window by God" (Rat Jelly, p. 59). And as the poet looks into the projector, he knows he can stop the action; he can even reverse it:

The horse is falling off the skyscraper
staggering through the air.
He will never reach
pavements of men and cars,
he is caught between
the 70th and 72nd floor of someone's brain.
The side of the building is a highway
he has left, bobbing dobbin.
A few frames later he will burst
through the window-washers' platform
and _they_ will fall but he continues
to pulse, held by the nightmare's chain.
(_Rat Jelly_, p. 59)

The man on the horse has "left the saddle dying" and "will be consumed before ever reaching the ground" (_Rat Jelly_, p. 59). And as Ondaatje explains in "Heron Rex," the perfection of technology can lead to a particular kind of precise madness--the sort of manic behaviour we see in the tales of Edgar Allan Poe. "There are ways of going/ physically mad, physically/ mad when you perfect the mind" (_Rat Jelly_, p. 53), we are told, and we see that the man who is obsessed with technology can indeed become mad.

When technology is the entire universe, as it is in "Heron Rex," the universe itself goes mad. "Those who couldn't find the muscles in their arms/ who drilled their beaks into the skin" try to communicate with "those who moved round the dials of imaginary clocks" and men who "pretended broken limbs, epilepsy,/ who managed to electrocute themselves on wire" (_Rat Jelly_, p. 52). The precision of technology becomes destructive, and men become machines. When the power inherent in the technology of consumer life meets the academic mind, the mind turns inward upon itself. In the poem "King Kong meets Wallace Stevens," the poet examines two photographs, one of King Kong and the other of Wallace Stevens. While the photograph of Stevens, the academic poet, shows us a man "portly, benign, a white brush cut/ striped tie" (Rat Jelly, p. 61), the picture of King Kong is dynamic, destructive, the essence of modern technology uncontrolled. Indeed, technology becomes entertainment and hence popular culture:

> Kong is staggering
> lost in New York streets again
> a spawn of annoyed cars at his toes.
> The mind is nowhere.
> Fingers are plastic, electric under the skin.
> He's at the call of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
> (Rat Jelly, p. 61)

And as King Kong destroys New York, "W. S. in his suit/ is thinking chaos is thinking fences" (Rat Jelly, p. 61). The intellect does not experience, and violence becomes an aesthetic form. The artist as outsider appears as Wallace Stevens, the ultimate man of pure intellect. For Stevens, only the intellect can create true art; but for Ondaatje and other writers of the new sensibility, in-depth involvement and simultaneity are far more important.

CHAPTER VI

BP NICHOL: THE REPOSITIONING OF LANGUAGE

One marked characteristic of the new sensibility is a distrust of conventional literary forms. Writers feel compelled to experiment with language, to develop new types of fiction and poetry, and in many instances they define new creative forms of language. Experiments may resemble the avant-garde works of the early modern period, as we see in Leonard Cohen's surrealistic novel Beautiful Losers, a work which owes much to the influence of the stream of consciousness technique developed by Gertrude Stein, James Joyce and others. Or experiments may incorporate new technological ideas, as we see in the later novels of Mordecai Richler. The tendency is most noticeable, however, in the works of poets, many of whom combine the techniques of poetry, fiction, and drama in order to create new works of art. In Michael Ondaatje's The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, this concern is obvious. Ondaatje uses photographs, filmic sequences, fragments of poetry, and prose passages to create a montage rather than a chronological history. We are reminded of the experiments of James Reaney, who consciously explored the confining effects of the printed word in The Red Heart, an early example of experimentation in Canadian poetry. As Reaney tells us in the poem "The Alphabet," the syllables "Muh, Cuh, Guh, and Chuh/ Grunt like pigs in my acorn mind";[1] and he stresses the need to explore the effects of the Word and to create a poetic language that is new.

Of the Canadian poets writing in the last decade, bp Nichol has been the most consistently interesting in his experiments with poetic language. And as Frank Davey points out, Nichol's work is "utterly unlike any Canadian symbolist writing of previous decades. It takes its inspiration not in the asceticism of William Morris or in the deliberately charged image structure of Baudelaire and Mallarme, but in the linguistic experiments of Dada and Gertrude Stein and in the semiotic experiments of European and South American visual poetry."[2] Rejecting the conventional association of language and meaning, Nichol prefers to view language itself as intrinsically meaningful. Both his poetry and his fiction attest to a desire to move beyond meaning towards an aesthetic of pure form. Experimenting with clichés, symbols or signs, filmic techniques, ideograms, blank pages, and drawings, Nichol explores the intrinsic meaning of language itself. Like Reaney, he explores the implications of the Word; trapped by the printed word, he often tries to move beyond the form. As Davey puts it, "Nichol regards every formal property of the book and the language as parts of a machine--parts which can be used either unobtrusively (as in conventional writing) or obtrusively so that they become not just means to an end but meaningful in themselves."[3]

Since 1964 bp Nichol has published almost forty books of poetry and fiction as well as a number of recordings. In his printed works, Nichol explores the ramifications of language and the alphabet as Marshall McLuhan does in later works such as Through the Vanishing Point. The printed word contracts and expands to form a new type of visual image. A letter or number becomes a symbol, a sign with qualities inherent in itself. In ABC, the Aleph Beth Book, for instance, Nichol reforms the letters of the alphabet so that each letter assumes a "personality."[4] The poems in Still Water are placed in a cardboard box in which they can be rearranged at will. And in Nichol's most complex work, The Martyrology, each word in the language becomes a saint, an aspect of the poet's creative personality. We place new environments around a word, and create new works of art. The poet-outsider of Ondaatje's works becomes a poet-martyr, an artist who creates by transcending the confines of conventional aesthetic forms.

In an excerpt from Book III of The Martyrology printed in White Pelican, Nichol tells us that "i wanted an image or a metaphor/ something to contain me/ within the flow of language presses in."[5] Words themselves provide a trap for the artist; as Nichol puts it, "you take a man's words to use against him/ twist language to such brutal ends."[6] In the electronic age of Marshall McLuhan, the printed word must be revitalized; the print environment is surrounded by the new electronic, oral environment. The artificial structures of print yield to a form closer to oral art forms:

> There must be a beginning made
> a starting over a writing down
> times when other voices do not distract

there must be an order in all things
to be discovered not imposed

there is an invisible world opens
a heaven or a hell
filled with the men or women I have killed or
disposed of
                    who never made them
but thot the power his

there is a listing or a taking of priorities
these things as i have noted them here

are taking place have taken
are the true & proper province of poetry and prayer[7]

Davey claims that "bp Nichol's writing is the most courageous body of work in Canadian literature today."[8] And in his exploration of our total semantic environment in the global village, Nichol is far advanced over most of his contemporaries. Like Bill Bissett and other sound poets, he often tries to move beyond the written word to a more direct means of communication based on the spoken, tribal language. As Nichol tells us in Journeying and the Returns, "we have reached the point where . . . language means communication . . . communication does not just mean language . . . we have come up against the problem, the actual facts of diversification, of finding as many exits as possible from the self."[9] Nichol's concrete poetry is a direct manifestation of his concern for the qualities inherent in print. Although his interest in form rather than meaning places him close to members of the TISH group of Canadian West Coast poets, Nichol rejects the direct speaking voice favoured by George Bowering, Lionel Kearns, Charles Olson, and their followers. He prefers to be evasive, to assume different poetic personalities as they suit him. As in the poetry of Michael Ondaatje, the poet is a low definition figure, a ghost who controls the operation of the poetic machine. Poetry becomes meaningful without direct reference to the personal traits of the poet. Indeed, the poet becomes a totally private figure whose existence appears almost fictional.

Nichol's aesthetic of poetic experimentation is most fully explored in a series of reflective poems beginning with Journeying and the Returns, and continuing on through Monotones and The Martyrology. In all these works, the poet strives to articulate an aesthetic based on the confining properties of print and the liberating qualities of the spoken word. Marshall McLuhan has said that Understanding Media should have been printed as an ideogram; the same could be said of Nichol's poetic works. Carefully designed to have a sharply visual impact, each of Nichol's books is an exploration of how we see words as well as how we hear them. Diagrams, etchings, and line drawings combine with poetry to form a mosaic approach to artistic creation. In The Martyrology, for example, etchings of the faces of saints can be changed to the frames of a film simply by leafing quickly through the pages of the book. Language itself is unstable and becomes a shifting, unpredictable force and a sort of visual kaleidoscope.

Nichol's only works of fiction, Andy and For Jesus Lunatic, were published together as Two Novels in 1969. Neither is in any sense a conventional novel, but each shows Nichol's attempt to write a work of fiction without reference to external guidelines or structures. In Andy, Nichol uses John Robert Colombo's approach of taking "found" materials and projecting these on a wider imaginative screen. As Davey points out, the book consists of "letters from Nichol's friend Andy Phillips, and sections from a factually-narrated fantasy adventure story, a melodramatically-narrated pornographic detective novel, and a jargon-filled futuristic science-fiction novel."[10] Although the multi-dimensional plot reminds us of a montage rather than a work of fiction, we recognize a technique similar to that used by Marshall McLuhan in his writing: multi-layered prose which exists on several levels. Like McLuhan's Understanding Media and The Gutenberg Galaxy, Nichol's novel is not meant to be read chronologically from front to back cover. For it is actually an exploration of how we trap ourselves by using particular types of clichés--familiar plots and situations that limit the serious writer. Throughout the book, Nichol juxtaposes fragments of plot, dialogue, and description in order to escape from the confines of verbal structures:

> over and out, receiving return signals, vortex of emotional abstract sucked forward in clear pull, over and out, do you read me? do you read me? centering the focal eye on the third ear swivel on separate extensions of the mind. finding the finger. down x. punched out the abstract cymbal ringing ear. hearing. je suis mort mon cherie. je suis mort. third cortical signal ignored till no made central implosive force. care for the living. care for the living. engine functioning on track nine return trip Vancouver to Toronto all aboard.
>
> July 7 44

> Yahoo caught a frog today. Seemed funny at first to find on here but we are in a special kind of marshland now an I guess it's warm enough here for them to live. He cooked frog legs. A welcome treat.
>
> shifting the focus. movement outward from word to flow. intake input at lower level than heretofore. divorce from ABC trapping influence. freedom. freedom. repetitive death of linear emotion. spheroid emotional state now in ascendancy. total being. lines opening again. free ll flow to follow hollowing motion of verbal wipeout.

As we see in this excerpt, the plot shifts from the "do you read me, do you read me" of the adventure story to the "je suis mort mon cherie" of the popular detective novel and finally to the jargon of science fiction. Conventional literary structures appear as artifacts of the mechanical age. A "divorce from ABC trapping," for instance, is seen as "the death of linear emotion"; and the metaphor is appropriately an "engine functioning on track nine return trip Vancouver to Toronto." In another passage in Andy, the airplane represents the linear aspect of the mechanical age: "Internal criticism of structure to maintain balance will now be established. all readers will fashion seatbelts and fasten" (Two Novels). The trap of words in a technological age is a mechanical trap.

A similar pattern is established in For Jesus Lunatick, though in this novel Nichol moves farther from clichéd plots towards the symbolic writing of Gertrude Stein or James Joyce. Plot and character are deliberately obscure and unimportant, and the stress is on language as symbol. Indeed, the technique of For Jesus Lunatick resembles the surrealism of Michael Ondaatje's The Collected Works of

Billy the Kid. Free association and word play define the voices of Nichol's characters. As in his own critical article, "Gertrude Stein's Theories of Personality," Nichol moves towards a simplified prose uncluttered by the conventional rules of punctuation and syntactic structure. The mind leaps from symbol to sign without reference to artificial grammatical barriers:

> roller moving jerkily over the bumpy ground
> stirs the stairs carpeted two years before removed
> swept that summer or last spring trailing the fingers
> along the brick up the tarnished brass doorknob in
> the dark brown door drapery blue velvet flowers
> one was always walking towards the mirror reflecting
> the comings and goings pauses in the mirror's
> surface inner hallway up the stairs past his door
> to Frank's beyond and a window facing the street
> below the roof overhanging shadows cast in late
> afternoon sun (Two Novels)

In both Andy and For Jesus Lunatick, Nichol uses the metaphor of technological complexity to suggest the trap of language. As in Robert Kroetsch's Gone Indian, technological devices become signs of the new sensibility, but the serious artist must go beyond technological artifice to create true art. The modern semantic environment becomes a huge junkpile of discarded technologies, many of which are no longer relevant. In this situation, the poet assumes the form of a technological voice: he may become a projector, teletype machine, or tape recorder. His only limitations are those imposed upon him by such devices, and his task is to try to make those limitations meaningful and ultimately to transcend them.

THE NEW ELECTRONIC MEDIA PROVIDE IMPLEMENTS FOR THE DISTORTION OF LANGUAGE

In his exploration of the limits of language, Nichol continually experiments with the form of the printed book. The new sensibility implies an interest in the spontaneous, spoken word rather than in static, printed aesthetic forms; Nichol moves us beyond language to a new, unified awareness of the poem itself as an organic form. His widely praised collection of poems, Journeying and the Returns (1967), explores the distortion of the physical world as the poet creates a new aesthetic world. Distorting language for effect and using exaggerated forms, Nichol experiments with both the written and the spoken word.[12] As he does so he combines different media to create a "happening" rather than a conventional collection of poetry. Basically Journeying and the Returns includes three parts: Borders, a record containing "sonic concrete" or sound poems; Letters Home, an envelope containing "visual concrete" poems; and the more conventional Journeying and the Returns, a book of non-concrete lyrics. Visual concrete derives from the written language and explores language as a graphic or pictorial art; sonic concrete derives from the spoken language and is related to music.[13]

The poems recorded on Borders explore the distortion of language through chanting. The new electronic media make it possible for language to be amplified and indeed totally changed; the tribal chants on Borders are modified by their transmission on electronic media. Poems such as "Dada Lama," "Beach at Port Dover," and "Cycle No. 17" become rhythmic songs, reminding us of the new experiments in electronic music. "Scraptures--Fifth Sequence" is a music poem in four movements accompanied by Nichol's performance notes, many of which are concerned with the use of echoes, sound units, and tape recordings. At certain points the tape is overtracked or a mixer is used; the new technology provides media that can change, distort conventional languages. The sonic concrete of Borders is rhythmical, tribal, and is a speaking voice of Marshall McLuhan's electronic global village. Electronic manipulation distorts language until language relinquishes whatever meaning it may once have had.[14]

In order to break the barriers of communication, the word must be oral rather than visual. The sounds of words, their oral associations, take precedence over visual meaning. Indeed, the printed word becomes what is described in Letters Home as a "mind trap"; and in this section of Journeying and the Returns, Nichol experiments with ways the printed word can be distorted and destroyed. One poem in the collection, "Cold Mountain," is described as a "kinetic poem/ sculpt" and is meant for "eventual destruction." The "assembly instructions" on the back of the poem describe how the poem may be easily burned by curling the pages and then dropping "a lit match down the centre cone." As the poet wryly notes, "for people unable to burn this, mimeographed copies suitable for burning are available from GANGLIA, 18 Elm Avenue, Toronto, Canada" (Journeying). One poem resembles a computer card, a contemporary symbol of technology; another recalls for us the fine"waves" of an oscilloscope. In redefining the printed word, it is necessary to use a collection of various technologies. A letter "To a Loved One" is included, as is a letter from Margaret Avison which says "can there be mime in words?--your poem comes to that: magnetic flow of force; speaking that does not distance a person who hears; giving and never giving anything away" (Journeying). The concrete poems in Letters Home range from a poem on purple paper exploring the word "orgy" to one on orange paper combining the words "low," "owl," and "how." Indeed, one poem appears to be a piece of unexposed photographic paper; on closer examination, it bears a faded representation of a printed "well-wrought urn," the conventional symbol of fixed aesthetic forms. In another concrete poem on orange construction paper, the word "turnip" undergoes several transformations:

turnips are
inturps are
urnspit are
tinspur are
rustpin are
stunrip are
piturns are
ritpuns are
punstir are
nutrpis are
suntrip are
untrips are
spinrut are
runspit are
pitnurs are

runtsip are
puntsir are
turnsip are
tipruns are
turpsin are
spurtin
        (*Journeying*)

Nichol varies the composition of his words with mathematical precision. There are no rules, no centres in his verbal universe; the physical world has become merely a source for the poet's images. In the book *Journeying and the Returns*, Nichol stresses the abstract nature of the physical universe. "The world/ is a screen of moving shadows," we are told, and art is only a "frame" that captures the flux of experience (*Journeying*). The poet asks for an end to such artificial barriers between art and life. In the technological world of the new electric technology, mechanical frames and walls are obsolete. Art becomes process rather than aesthetic object, and poems do not need to be framed--they simply exist:

where
      do
the walls
              end
their movements
in doors

where
      do
the windows
          frame
their world

where
      do
my own
      windows
              move
that they appear here

to frame
my eyes
(*Journeying*)

The poet needs to go beyond images, "beyond/ the eye," for the eye, "drawing back/ fragments/ into the brain" (*Journeying*) has not the organic spontaneity of the new oral electronic age. Like a camera the eye captures and "freezes" an object, and the visual medium of print defines the aesthetic object instead of the process of aesthetic creation. Images are "caught back/ in the brain's shell/ in the tongue's prison" (*Journeying*); the poet who uses only print cannot sing the tribal chants of the new electronic age. Nichol's verbal experiments provide a release from such paralysis. "The/ knuckles of my hands/ burst forth in/ raw air," he tells us, "the circle turns around me" (*Journeying*). The tribal voice of the global village frees the poet from the use of conventional, artificial poetic forms. Conventional printed poetry may appeal to the pre-McLuhan literary man, but the confident voice of Nichol's sound poetry belongs to the involved, aware citizen of a modern technological world.

LANGUAGE PROVIDES A TRAP FOR WRITERS OF THE NEW SENSIBILITY

Nichol's poetic universe is a purely verbal construct in which language provides a trap. The poet continually tries to explore the ramifications of grammar, syntax, and the connotations of words. Most of Nichol's books of poetry are unpaginated, and this in itself indicates his wish to escape from the confines of chronological form. The poems in Monotones (1969), for instance, are numbered but even those numbers do not form a logical sequence. In Journeying and the Returns, Nichol experiments with the images of the physical world; in Monotones he explores the shape of language without reference to physical reality. Indeed, language becomes the mystical instructor of the poet, an idea explored at length in The Martyrology. The Word becomes a saint, and the saint in turn is an aspect of Nichol's poetic personality. "Chaos rumoured/ saints distance perception," we are told in Monotones, for "words/ weight the fingers/ down."[15] The semantic environment presses in upon the poet, creating a sense of captivity, of claustrophobia. False signs and symbols represent a treacherous poetic universe:

holds

        over and over the future folds around you
trapped by the steps you cannot take

choices

false signs and numbers

false auguries of false hope
swept away by the hand's
gesture
                (Monotones)

In Monotones, language becomes an oral rather than a written art form. Marshall McLuhan has emphasized the importance of electronic media in the new sensibility's stress on simultaneity, and Nichol as a poet explores this through the fragmented, spoken word. Many of the poems in

Monotones, it seems, might have been retrieved from tape recordings of personal conversations. There is little interest in the conventional rules of grammar and syntax. The poet tells us that there is a "certain imperative" in "waving the connectives/ goodbye" (Monotones). Shackled by poetic artifice, he attempts to "brush the leaves away" and to define a new kind of poetic freedom. And as he also points out, "the poem ends/ all the same" (Monotones). The artist-outsider becomes a kind of peeping tom, a voyeur who hears "a conversation in another room" and then feels compelled to "fill up a page with scribbling on/ my fool" (Monotones). But still he cannot force himself to write the artificial poetry implied by rules of rhyme, rhythm, and sentence structure:

> sometimes you just want to get off one long sentence
> before you die
>
> sometimes you die
> & the sentence hangs there
>
> hell
>
> the sentence is served
> obsequious king fool
>
> who the man
> who does not know
> his face?
> (Monotones)

While language is the poet's mystical instructor, it has little reference to the physical universe. Space and time are confused and have no meaning except in the individual perception of the poet. Memories from the past appear as if "from another time/ not mine no part of/ my world" (Monotones). As the poet tells us, "the legend's covered in lies" (Monotones); there is no reality except for the intuitive, unintellectualized present. The lies of fiction and myth must be re-examined and dispelled in the present, for art can only recreate a personal version of the past. Like Michael Ondaatje in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Nichol seeks to assemble fragments of the past. "Out of the dark wood/ workings/ of the mind's memories we are/ alone," he explains, and poetic art brings us "deeper & deeper into/ the mysteries" (Monotones).

The poet's fears, anxieties, and loves provide a mirror in which Nichol sees an image of the past. But any mirror image is some distance from the viewer, and can never be totally captured. Looking back to "the circle of/ my beginning," the poet asks in desperation "what mirrors do they use to trick us? (Monotones). In searching for his image, the "mad lord fool," the poet feels alternatively like a man "possessed" and then "dispossessed/ & screaming" (Monotones). Only personal commitment can release him momentarily from the cage of language. "The soul sings its own song/ plays its own game," we are told, and the lover who sings "like anything" is a symbol that goes beyond language (Monotones). But even the lover's singing lasts only for a moment:

> the quartered note breaks
>
> pick up the stakes of
> a lost game

squares
to move in
into halls walls nouns and names the
spaces seem futile
too far to cross properly
(singing)
& are closed off

or are not seen
(*Monotones*)

Each lyric in *Monotones* might be considered a 16 mm slide, a black and white "photo held against the light" (*Monotones*). As in the case of minimal art, the images of Nichol's poems are subdued, low-keyed. This is a minimal poetry in which undefined images are placed before us; we must being these images into focus as if we were using a slide projector. Instead of the "false prose" of the physical universe, we see "a ghost of forms/ shifting as the table moves/ around you" (*Monotones*). The book might be compared to a video-tape loop, a chanting repetition of personal realities. The cyclic process avoids "beginnings/ or endings/ (in/ animate/ things)" (*Monotones*), and the stress is rather on multi-layered perception through a new, more compact poetic language. Based on the spoken chant instead of poetic artifice, the new language involves the repetition of key words and phrases. "I have given my heart/ to a dark/ woman," Nichol chants, "given my eyes/ to the dark/ woman of/ the wood" and "given the darkness/ into your eyes" (*Monotones*).

Unity is given to the physical world by the repetitive nature of Nichol's poetic voice. For the physical world is without reference and is defined by confusion. "The mind is bridled by/ confusion" (Monotones), the poet tells us, and the fragmented nature of the physical universe complicates the use of language. In the physical world, "the loon sings/ for no apparent reason" and "flies/ over the lake/ the season/ not yet cold" (Monotones). The "idle wind" which blows wild roses is soon to be "taken/ tied &/ made whole" (Monotones). The poet recalls each day as "a day when nothing fit" (Monotones), and finds that conventional words are inadequate to describe his perceptual universe:

> terra
>
> earth
>
> mother of gods
>
> who goes before me?
>
> thera
>   the one
> ra
>
> & i follow
> flow
>   after
>
> into the moon
>   (Monotones)

Yet poetry is a unifying force in this fragmented universe. The natural and linguistic barriers of conventional art yield to a more plastic, organic art form directly related to intuitive perception. Addressing the sun, the poet asks "don't you ever get tired/ of having the clouds between you and us?" (Monotones). He wishes to overcome the barriers separating poetry from life. Through "uncrossed geographies/ the soul must travel" (Monotones), but the poet has a responsibility to provide a focus, to clarify the outlines of language. In the final lyric of Monotones, we see that Nichol is finally able to focus the projector on a landscape that is an image of the mind. "Coming into my own motions," the poet is able to discern "countryside toning down/ green into brown/ explosions of red & orange." "Pastures & distant sounds" are "brought into focus," and the "body's being" seems "alive." The barriers between poetic artifice and experience have been crossed successfully, and there are now "no saints/ no oceans to cross between me & my own existence" (Monotones).

THE TRIBAL CHANT OF THE GLOBAL VILLAGE IS AN ALTERNATIVE TO LANGUAGE AS MECHANISM

The language of Nichol's poems indicates a struggle with poetic theory, a questioning of the poetic process. In all his books language is explored as the connecting link between art and life. Nichol's most complex work, The Martyrology (1972), uses the metaphor of the saint to represent the vicissitudes of the printed and spoken word. Indeed, the saint becomes the Word, and in thus personifying the lives and legends of words Nichol uses the symbol of the saint to represent different sides of his own poetic personality. Language becomes spiritualized, a mystical instructor without reference to physical reality. In his discussion of The Martyrology, Frank Davey stresses this interest in the saint as language:

> Nichol's guides in *The Martyrology* are words which, in their ability to symbolize for him the agonizing circumstances he shares with the rest of humanity, have become the "saints"of his linguistic cosmos. St. And represents the acausal disorders of three-dimensional *non sequitur*; amid this confusing network of "and's" many men merely "stand" in paralysis. St. Orm represents the vagaries of elemental violence in which mortal man must live; St. Reat ("estreat"), the documentary records a man's past experiences become, coughed up "in nightmares/ screaming and babbling." Only St. Rand offers any hope of unity and peace, and St. Rike any possibility that man can "seize the moment" and live a significant present-tense life free of the tortures of history, personal guilt, and instable materiality.[15]

As in his other works, Nichol views language itself as a machine with interchangeable parts. "The language i write is no longer spoken," he tells us, "my hands turn the words/ clumsily."[16] Each word in the language, each saint, becomes a magic sign. Yet except for their obvious connotative meanings, these words have little reference to reality. "A long time ago i thot i knew how this poem would go, how the figures of the saints would emerge," we are told, "now it's covered over by my urge to write you what lines i can" (*Martyrology*, I). By implication *The Martyrology* is involved with the life and death of language; it also implies the canonization of language through the printed word. Yet the past only exists for us in the form of a certain medium, and we create the past through our new media and technologies. "There are no myths we have not created/ ripped whole from the fabric of days," the poet explains, and "no legends that could not be lies" (*Martyrology*, I). In the modern age, the part of poetry has become only "this phony architecture you hide behind/

well" (Martyrology, I). The past and present provide no points of reference, and we must take refuge in our own perceptions. Modern technology creates a bureaucracy of words. Trapped by a "history you cannot acknowledge" and by modern "signs," man finds that "language multiplies above the cities/ the letters meaningless words/ we have less & less to say to one another" (Martyrology, II). Words provide a trap that man, the modern technological robot, has unwittingly built for himself:

> only the man trapped in words recognizes that futility
> as language was the prototype
> perfect model of the robot run amuck
> the tool that never could replace its master
> become, as it were, a thing in itself
> how i lay in anger, devastated
> the night rob told me words did not exist
> seen now as it is a substitution
> we let it run our lives
> wrongly
> no there is no point finally
> the systems that evolve made futile by that basic gap
> never did learn how to touch beyond a one to one level
> the social organism becomes a cancer
> we attempt to simplify something that does not exist
> (Martyrology, II)

The martyring of Nichol's saints symbolically represents the binding and destruction of creative artists by the force of language. The poet envisions "those bodies wrapped in chains/ as language was the chain they did not see," and suggests that "we must return again to human voice and listen/ rip off the mask of words to free the sounds/ we wear the chains as muscles" (Martyrology, II). The Martyrology is an attempt to go beyond the confines of language into the realm of sound and film. Like a film the book is fragmented, discontinuous; the poems shift rapidly from one frame to the next. The camera catches glimpses of Nichol's personal feelings, his private life, his love affairs. And as in the new electronic technologies of radio and television, there is a stress on the hypnotic effect of repetitive sound patterns and chanting. Nichol has recorded his sound poetry on a number of records, including the well known Canadada; in The Martyrology, he often resorts to the tribal chant of Marshall McLuhan's electronic global village. "Here there is a peace the mind can breathe in," he tells us, "nothing but the tangles in my tongue/ let the sounds sweep in around me/ in a heaven with no need of poetry" (Martyrology, II). Often his poems are a prayer, a spiritualized hymn to the sound of words:

"oh let me sing

oh let me dance

oh god please give me
a second chance

i was never for prayer
i was never for peace
i was never that happy
i was never that pleased

but oh let me sing

oh let me dance

oh god please give me
a second chance"
(Martyrology, II)

Through repetition and chanting, language is regenerated and is eventually made whole again.[7] Lost in this fragmented poetic universe, the poet performs a sort of linguistic exorcism. "I get lost/ poem-maker cloud-hidden/ you were one and the same" (Martyrology, I), the poet explains, for he must lose himself in the verbal universe to recreate the Word. As both observer and observed, subject and object, the poet tries to capture experience in images that are new and beyond those we already know. In this way "our words are broken/ the language made whole again" (Martyrology, II). The process frees the Word from the confines of the printed page, and instead recreates it as a sound to be chanted, listened to, and replayed. The new technology frees man from the tyranny of the visual print medium, and introduces him to the spoken word. The artificial boundaries of print become obsolete:

> it is the minute haunts you
> final image of
> the trapped phrase
>
> smile differently
>
> always tensions building in the poem to pass thru
> impossible wall i do
>
> need you now my fingers can't touch you
>
> words slam the page
>
> freeze
> (Martyrology, II)

Every word in the language becomes a saint with a distinct personality. Yet the poetic process implies an intuitive willingness to vary those personalities, to experiment with the image rather than with its connotative meaning. As Nichol puts it, poetic expression is "finally the whole process/ as it is & has been/ mostly flow" and the poet must "watch the words go/ as the days do"

(Martyrology, II). Looking into "mirrors into mirrors/ into mirrors," (Martyrology, II), the poet finds that history is cyclic and recreates itself in the present; it becomes "the world discovered/ rediscovered/ this century this day" (Martyrology, II). Lives of saints and of words have their only reality in each new technological expansion of society. Indeed, the poet-visionary can catch only the "edge of vision"; he must believe in the freedom and power of the new experimental poetry, for it forms an original poetic language unifying the precision of science with the creative process:

> there is a music in the moment come together
> joyce thot he knew or that insistence stein found
> approximation of the one voice vision
> repetition condensation theory ways of speaking we can
> choose
>
> now there is a language speaks apparent
> as in mirage or magic thus the choice is made
> geomancy the lost art of which noone teaches
> apparent thru entendre je ne compris
> my world is split
>
> blake saw the chance to be here in canada
> serpent power sacred to be wrestled with
> real energy my body releases
> i can gain the reins of
>
> tho the visionaries are destroyed
> or leave willingly as and did
> the as's build
> one chain apparent thru the life work
> i grasp the edge of vision & am frightened
> (Martyrology, II)

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: SYMBOLS FOR OUR TIMES

The decentralized, non-authoritarian environment of the new sensibility demanded involvement and participation. The writers who gained prominence in the sixties explored the implications of man's new freedom through electronic technology. Mythology became alive, contemporary instead of historical, static. The post modernist sensibility celebrated process rather than formalized aesthetic concerns. In the writings of Marshall McLuhan, the electronic implications of the new sensibility were presented in a multi-levelled, multi-dimensional form characteristic of the new sensibility. Indeed, McLuhan's Understanding Media should be considered an ideogram rather than a conventional book. Reading Understanding Media demands involvement as the mind leapfrogs from level to level, topic to topic, page to page. Many of McLuhan's revolutionary ideas on media were accepted by writers of the sixties, and works of prose, poetry and drama show an interest in the ideas presented in his works. Poets such as Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, and Victor Coleman experimented with the forms of technological simultaneity embodied in McLuhan's writings. Sound poets such as Bill Bissett and bp Nichol experimented with the variations possible when the word became sound as well as print. During the sixties the poetry of previously conventional poets such as Elizabeth Brewster and Miriam Mandel also turned to the technological concerns explored in McLuhan's works. Miriam Mandel's poem "U.L.O.," for instance, is a fanciful poem using images from consumer technology and the release implied by the electric technology of space:

> Dry eyed I sit here and stare at the space
> which is not space
> cluttered with chairs, t.v., record players,
> the shells and rocks
> collected in another life so distant
> I remember only a might have been.
> Somewhere the tears themselves cry
> to each other deep in my soul
> or my crooked left big toe, but I am
> alone, locked in my box of no feelings
> or all feelings--labelled 'unidentified lying object.'[1]

For post modernist poets such as bp Nichol, Victor Coleman, George Bowering, and Margaret Atwood, the aesthetic interest in form characteristic of modernism changed to an interest in organic process. The new sensibility of the sixties implied a disorganized, kinetic perceptive world, a tribal village without national boundaries. The new electric technologies of radio, film, and tape recorder began to replace the chronological print medium. Poets began to see their environment through the lens created by the power of new electric media. The power of the mind was extended through the new technology; in Victor Coleman's poem "Cones Fall," the mind itself becomes electronic:

>   ideas buzzing by like freeway autos
> bumper to bumper in a physical world
>   the lines of power run true
> run straight through a swathe in the rainforest
>   bigger than a highway.[2]

The new electric technology created a new language in poetry and prose. It was a spoken language, an oral voice sensitive to the nuances of common speech. It appeared in the experiments of the TISH group of poets, particularly in the poems of Frank Davey, Bill Bissett, and Lionel Kearns. But it also affected the more conventional poetry of poets such as Margaret Atwood; in Atwood's latest book of poems, You Are Happy, passages of surrealistic prose alternate with equally surrealistic poems. The new sensibility saw poets such as Michael Ondaatje combining prose and poetry to produce multi-media happenings such as his The Collected Works of Billy the Kid. Other new writers such as Daphne Marlatt in Rings created a new prose that was close to poetry:

> Each a
> room. Internal. Order of time.
>
> So, light pierces matter
> parts, clouds uncountably moving. What's in the works?
> or moves. Move, move, your move. It does work light
> in that way lights up . . . & his? how does his
> room work (contrary)? what outside time or in place
> we drive, to enter. Coming in & going out, he wants
> to break thru, shatter . . .
> Can I?
>
> at the doors flickering . . .[3]

The new sensibility of the sixties stressed the organic unity of the literary arts. Prose writers such as Dave Godfrey, Robert Harlow, Matt Cohen, and Leo Simpson expressed the new sensibility in novels that might be considered prose poems. Taking materials from the media of television, newspapers, interviews, tape recordings, and radio these novels tried to define the spontaneous perceptive world of the new technological environment. Novels became mosaics of various media; their only form became the process of individual perception. Often they resembled collages of "found" materials from the new technology. The new oral language of poetry found its analogue in such powerful prose works as Rudy Wiebe's The Temptations of Big Bear and Robert Kroetsch's Gone Indian. In long condensed passages of prose, novelists began to stress the view of the artist as technological outsider, as a sort of "peeping tom." A passage from Robert Harlow's Scann is typical of the new prose writing:

> Scann kneels and puts his eye to the keyhole. There is no key on the other side. Marie is there, sitting at Thrain's desk, her feet up on the blotter. Her C. O. is out of the picture. Shards of last night's emotion when Stephanie walks past him naked in the dark stir. Voyeur Scann moves to try to see Thrain. He appears at the side of the desk, but Scann can't see his face.[4]

Many novelists began to experiment with filmic techniques in their novels. Mordecai Richler's The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, Cocksure, and St. Urbain's Horseman are highly dependant on the shifts and flashbacks characteristic of the film medium. The characters in Margaret Atwood's Surfacing are attempting to define experience through the making of a film. Photographic techniques began to dominate the artistic sensibility during the sixties. In Michael Ondaatje's poem "Looking into the Projector," film provided a medium by means of which the poet might "freeze" experience:

> The horse is falling off the skyscraper
> staggering through the air.
> He will never reach
> pavements of men and cars,
> he is caught between
> the 70th and 72nd floor of someone's brain.
> (Rat Jelly, p. 59)

During the sixties the electric extension of the human nervous system led to an exploration, an examination of man's place in the new technological environment. The growth of the counter-culture emphasized man's need to examine the effects of the new technology and the accompanying new morality. Novelists such as Mordecai Richler in St. Urbain's Horseman and Margaret Atwood in Surfacing showed man struggling to understand the vast changes in society affecting his life. The deep involvement of the new electronic media led to a new interest in the roles assumed by men and women in a technological society. In her short stories and in her novel Lives of Girls and Women, Alice Munro functioned as a photographer capturing the role of woman in a mechanized world:

> The coloured lights had gone blurry, they were moving up and down like stretched elastic bands. People's faces had undergone a slight, obscene enlargement across the cheeks; it was as if I was looking at faces reflected on a curved polished surface. Also the heads seemed large, out of proportion to the bodies; I imagined them--though I did not really see them--detached from bodies, floating smoothly on invisible trays.[5]

The new morality of the sixties affected all human relationships. It stressed the need for a frank, honest attitude towards sexual relationships and an acceptance of sexual themes in all forms of art. Poets and prose writers accepted the use of taboo words as part of their new artistic language; they often used as subjects men and women striving to understand and relate to the new permissiveness. Writers such as Dave Godfrey in The New Ancestors and Mordecai Richler in St. Urbain's Horseman described man attempting to make comprehensible the freedom generated by the new electronic media. They showed man often obsessed with his new sensibility, his new freedom; often their characters became slaves of the technology they had helped to create. Yet each character is always conscious of his new potential for freedom through the new electronic environment. As Margaret Atwood stresses in The Edible Woman, the technological city need not devour its victims. The new freedom she and other writers explore releases man from the stasis of mechanism and confers upon him a new potential for involvement, participation, and cooperation--a new freedom that began in the sixties and is still with us today.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

[1] Frank Davey, *From There to Here: A Guide to English-Canadian Literature Since 1960* (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1974), p. 11.

[2] *Contemporary Poetry of British Columbia*, ed. J. Michael Yates (Vancouver: The Sono Nis Press, 1970), p. 45.

[3] Davey, *From There to Here*, pp. 186-187.

[4] *Poets of Contemporary Canada 1960-1970*, ed. Eli Mandel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), p. 113.

[5] George Bowering, *In the Flesh* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 64.

[6] *Poets of Contemporary Canada 1960-1970*, p. 43.

[7] Davey, *From There to Here*, p. 22.

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